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"Vain, witless woman! why should I desire
To add more heat to thy immortal fire?
To urge thee, by the violence of hate,
To shake the pillars of thine own estate,
When whatsoever we intend to do,
Our worst misfortune ever sorteth to;
And nothing else remains for us beside,
But only tears and coffins to provide!"

DRAYTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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R E V E N G E .

CHAPTER I.

LET me take you to an old-fashioned country house, built by architects of the reign of James the First, (about eighty years before the commencement of this story) and manifesting all the peculiarities—I might almost say the oddities—of that particular epoch in the building art. It had chimneys innumerable; Heaven only knows what rooms they ventilated; but their name must have been legion. The windows were not fewer, and much more irregular; for

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the chimneys were gathered together in some sort of symmetrical order, while the windows were scattered over the various faces of the building with no apparent arrangement at all. Heaven knows, also, what rooms they lighted, or were intended to light, for they scarcely served that purpose, being narrow, and obstructed by the stone mullions of the Elizabethan age. Each, too, had its label of stone superincumbent, and projecting from the brickwork, which might leave the period of construction somewhat doubtful—but the gables decided the fact.

They, also, were manifold ; for although the house had received no additions since its original erection, it seemed, nevertheless, to have been raised in detached masses, and joined together as best the builder could ; so that there were no less than six gables, facing north, south, east, and west, with four right angles, and flat walls between them. These gables were topped, as it were, by a triangular wall,

somewhat higher than the acute roof; and this wall was constructed with a row of steps, coped with freestone, on either side of the ascent, as if the architect had fancied that some man or statue would, one day or another, climb to the top of the pyramid, and take his place upon the crowning stone.

It was a gloomy old edifice : the bricks had become discoloured ; the livery of age, yellow and grey lichen, was upon it ; daws hovered round the chimney tops ; rooks passed cawing over it, on the way to their conventicle hard by ; no swallow built under the eaves ; and the trees, as if repelled by the stern, cold aspect of the house, retreated from it on three sides, leaving it alone on its own flat ground, like a moody man amidst a gay society.

On the fourth side, indeed, an avenue—that is to say, two rows of old elms—crept cautiously up to it in a winding and sinuous course, as if afraid of approaching too rapidly ; and at the distance of some

five or six hundred yards, clumps of old beeches, evergreen oaks, and trees, of sombre foliage, dotted the park, only enlivened, here and there, by a herd of deer.

Now and then, a milk-maid, a country woman going to church or market, a peasant, or a game-keeper, might be seen traversing the dry, brown expanse of grass, and but rarely deviating from a beaten path, which led from one stile over the park wall to another. It was all sombre and monotonous: the very spirit of dulness seemed to hang over it; and the clouds themselves—the rapid sportive clouds, free denizens of the sky, and playmates of the wind and sunbeam—appeared to grow sleepy and tardy, as they passed across the wide space open to the view, and to proceed with awe and gravity, like timid youth in the presence of stern old age.

Enough of the outside of the house. Let me take you into the interior, reader, and into one particular room—not the

largest and the finest ; but one of the highest. It was a little oblong chamber, with one window, ornamented—the only ornament the chamber had—with a decent curtain of red and white checked linen. On the side next the door, and between it and the western wall, was a small bed. A walnut-tree table and two or three chairs were near the window. In one corner stood a washing-stand, not very tidily arranged, in another a chest of drawers ; and opposite the fire-place, hung, from nails driven into the wall, two or three shelves of the same material as the table, each supporting a row of books, which by the dark black covers, brown edges, and thumbled corners, seemed to have a right to boast of some antiquity and much use. A volume, soiled, and “dog’s-eared” has, in most cases, arrived at its highest honours.

At the table, as you perceive, is seated a boy of about fifteen years of age, with pen and ink and paper, and an open book.

If you look over his shoulder, you will perceive that the words are Latin. Yet he reads with ease and facility, and seeks no aid from the dictionary. It is the "Cato Major" of Cicero. Heaven! what a book for a child like that to read! Boy-hood studying old age!

But let us turn from the book, and examine the lad himself more closely. See that pale face, with a man-like, unnatural gravity upon it. Look at that high, broad brow, towering as a monument above the eyes. Remark those eyes themselves, with their deep, eager thought; and then the gleam in them—something more than earnestness, and less than wildness—a thirsty sort of expression, as if they drank in what they rested on, and yet were unsated.

The brow rests upon the pale, fair hand, as if requiring something to support the heavy weight of thought with which the brain is burdened. He marks nothing but the lines of that old book. His whole soul

is in the eloquent words. He hears not the door open ; he sees not that tall, venerable, but somewhat stiff and gaunt figure, enter, and approach him. He reads on, till the old man's Geneva cloak brushes his arm, and his hand is upon his shoulder. Then the youth starts up—looks around—but says nothing. A faint smile, pleasant yet grave, crosses his finely cut lip ; but that is the only welcome, as he raises his eyes to the face that bends over him. Can that boy in years be already aged in heart ?

It is clear that the old man—the old clergyman, for so he evidently is—has no very tender nature. Every line of his face forbids the supposition. The expression itself is grave, not to say stern. There is powerful thought about it, but small gentleness. He seems one of those who has been tried and hardened in some one of the many fiery furnaces which the world provides for the test of men of strong minds and strong hearts. Much persecution has been in the land. Changes, from the rigid

and severe to the light and frivolous—from the light and frivolous to the bitter and cruel—have marked the time. There have been tyrants of all shapes and all characters within the previous forty years, and fools, and knaves, and madmen, to cry them on in every course of evil. In all these chances and changes, what fixed and rigid mind could escape the fangs of persecution and wrong? The old man had known both; but they had altered him little. His was originally an unbending spirit, and it grew more tough and stubborn by the habit of resistance.

Fortune—Heaven's will—or his own inclination, had denied him wife or child; and near relation, he had none. A friend he had: that boy's father, who had sheltered him in evil times, protected him as far as possible against the rage of enemies, and bestowed upon him the small living which afforded him support. He did his duty therein, conscientiously, but with a

firm, unyielding spirit, adhering to the Calvinistic tenets which he had early received, in spite of the universal falling-off of companions and neighbours. He would not have yielded an iota to save his head.

With all his hardness, he had one object of affection, to which all that was gentle in his nature was bent. That object was the boy by whom he now stood, and for whom he had a great—an almost parental—regard. Perhaps, it was that he thought the lad not very well treated ; and, as such had been his own case, there was sympathy in the matter. But, besides, he had been entrusted with his education from a very early period, had taken a pleasure in the task, had found his scholar apt, willing, and affectionate, with a sufficient touch of his own character in the boy to make the sympathy strong, and yet sufficient diversity to interest and to excite.

The old man was tenderer towards him than towards any other being upon earth ; and he sometimes feared that his early

injunctions to study and perseverance were too strictly followed—even to the detriment of health. He often looked with some anxiety at the increasing paleness of the cheek, at the too vivid gleam of the eye, at the eager, nervous quivering of the lip, and said within himself,

“This is overdone.”

He did not like to check, after he had encouraged—to draw the rein where he had been using the spur. There is something of vanity in us all, and the sternest is not without that share which makes man shrink from the imputation of error, even when made by his own heart. He did not choose to imagine that the lad had needed, no urging forward; and yet he would fain have had him relax a little more, and strove, at times, to make him do so. But the impulse had been given: it had carried the youth over the difficulties and obstacles in the way to knowledge, and now he went on to acquire it, with an eagerness, a thirst, that had something fearful in it. A bent,

too, had been given to his mind—nay, to his character, partly by the stern, uncompromising character of him to whom his education had been solely entrusted, partly by his own peculiar situation, and partly by the subjects on which his reading had chiefly turned.

The stern old Roman of the early Republic; the deeds of heroic virtue—as virtue was understood by the Romans; the sacrifice of all tender affections, all the sensibilities of our nature, to the rigid thought of what is right; the remorseless disregard of feelings implanted by God, when opposed to the notion of duties of man's creation, excited his wonder and his admiration, and would have hardened and perverted his heart, had not that heart been naturally full of kindlier affections. As it was, there often existed a struggle—a sort of hypothetical struggle—in his bosom, between the mind and the heart. He asked himself sometimes, if he could sacrifice any of those he knew and loved—his father,

his mother, his brother—to the good of his country, to some grave duty ; and he felt pained, and roused to resistance of his own affections, when he perceived what a pang it would cost him.

Yet his home was not a very happy one : the kindlier things of domestic life had not gathered green around him. His father was varying and uneven in temper, especially towards his second son ; sometimes stern and gloomy, sometimes irascible almost to a degree of insanity. Generous, brave, and upright, he was ; but every one said, that a wound he had received on his head, in 1651 at the battle of Worcester, had marvellously increased the infirmities of his temper.

The mother, indeed, was full of tenderness and gentleness ; and doubtless it was through her veins that the milk of human kindness had found its way into that strange boy's heart. But yet she loved her eldest son best, and unfortunately shewed it.

The brother was a wild, rash, reckless young man, about three years older ; fond

of the other, yet often pleased to irritate—or, at least, to try, for he seldom succeeded. He was the favorite, however, somewhat spoiled, much indulged ; and whatever was done, was done for him. He was the person most considered in the house : his were the parties of pleasure ; his the advantages. Even now the family was absent, in order to let him see the capital of his native land, to open his mind to the general world, to shew him life on a more extended scale than could be done in the country ; and his younger brother was left at home, to pursue his studies in dull solitude.

Yet he did not often complain : there was seldom even a murmur at his heart. He endeavoured to think it all quite right. His destiny was before him. He was to form his fortune for himself, by his own abilities, his own learning, his own exertions. It was needful he should study ; and his highest ambition for the time was to enter with distinction at the University ; his brightest thoughts of plea-

sure, the comparative freedom and independence of a collegiate life.

Not that he did not find it dull—that gloomy old house, inhabited by none but himself and a few servants. Sometimes it seemed to oppress him with a sense of terrible loneliness ; sometimes it drove him to think of the strange difference of human destinies, and why it should be that—because it had pleased Heaven, that one man should be born a little sooner or a little later than another, or in some other place—such a wide interval should be placed between the different degrees of happiness and fortune.

He felt, however, that such speculations were not good : they led him beyond his depth ; he involved himself in subtilties more common in those days than in ours ; he lost his way ; and with passionate eagerness flew to his books, to drive the mists and shadows from his mind. Such had been the case, even now ; and there he sat, unconscious that a complete

and total change was coming over his destiny.

Oh, the dark workshop of Fate! what strange things go on therein, affecting human misery and joy, repairing or breaking shackles for the mind, creating the means of carrying us forward in a glorious cause, or forming the relentless weights which hurry us down to destruction! While you sit there and read—while I sit here and write—who can say what strange alterations, what combinations in the most discrepant things, may be going on around—without our will, without our knowledge—to alter the whole course of our future existence? Doubtless, could man make his own fate, he would mar it; and the impossibility of doing so is good. The freedom of his own actions is sufficient, nay, somewhat too much; and it is well for the world—ay, and for himself—that an over-ruling Providence so shapes circumstances around him, that he cannot go beyond his limit, flutter as he will.

Something is in that old man's face more than is common with him—a deeper gravity even than ordinary, yet mingled with a tenderness that is rare. There is something like hesitation, too—ay, hesitation even in him who during a stormy life has seldom known what it is to doubt or to deliberate : a man of strict and ready preparation, whose fixed, clear, definite mind was always prompt and competent to act.

“Come, Philip, my son,” he said, laying his hand, as I have stated, on the lad's shoulder, “enough of study for to-day. You read too hard. You run before my precepts. The body must have thought as well as the mind ; and if you let the whole summer day pass without exercise, you will soon find that, under the weight of corporeal sickness, the intellect will flag, and the spirit droop. I am going for a walk. Come with me ; and we will converse of high things by the way.”

“Study is my task and my duty, sir,”

replied the boy ; " my father tells me so, you have told me so often ; and, as for health, I fear not. I seem refreshed when I get up from reading, especially such books as this. It is only when I have been out long, riding or walking, that I feel tired."

" A proof that you should ride and walk the more," observed the old man. " Come, put on your hat and cloak. You shall read no more to-day. Other thoughts are before you. You know, Philip," he continued, " that by reading we get but materials, which we must use to build up an edifice in our own minds. If all our thoughts are derived from others gone before us, we are but robbers of the dead, and live upon labours not our own."

" Elder sons," rejoined the boy, with a laugh, " who take an inheritance for which they toiled not."

" Something worse than that," replied the clergyman, " for we gather what we do not employ rightly—what we have

every right to possess, but upon the sole condition of using well. Each man possessed of intellect is bound to *make* his own mind, not to have it made for him : to adapt it to the times and circumstances in which he lives, squaring it by just rules, and employing the best materials he can find."

"Well, sir, I am ready," said the youth, after a moment of deep thought.

He and his old preceptor now issued forth together down the long staircase, with the slant sunshine pouring through the windows upon the unequal steps, and illuminating the motes in the thick atmosphere we breathe, like fancy brightening the idle floating things which surround us in this world of vanity.

They walked across the park towards the stile. The youth was silent, for the old man's last words seemed to have awakened a train of thought altogether new.

His companion was silent also ; for a burden was on his mind which embarrassed

and distressed him. He had something to tell that young man, and he knew not how to tell it. For the first time in his life he perceived, from the difficulty he experienced in deciding upon his course, how little he really knew of his pupil's character. He had dealt much with his intellect, and that he comprehended well—its depth, its clearness, its powers ; but his heart and disposition he had not scanned so accurately. He had a surmise, indeed, that there were feelings strong and intense within ; but he thought that the mind ruled them with habitual sway which nothing could shake. Yet he paused and pondered ; and once he stopped, as if about to speak, but went on again and said nothing.

At length, as they approached the park wall, he laid his finger on his temple, muttering to himself, " Yes, the quicker the better. 'Tis well to mingle two passions. Surprise will share with grief—if much grief there be."

Then turning to the young man, he said,

"Philip, I think you loved your brother Arthur?"

He spoke loudly, and in distinct tones ; but the lad did not seem to remark the past tense he used.

"Certainly, sir," he said, "I love him dearly. What of that?"

"Then you will be very happy to hear," pursued the old man, "that he has been singularly fortunate—I mean that he has been removed from earth and all its allurements—the vanities, the sins, the follies of the world in which he seemed destined to move, before he could be corrupted by its evils, or his spirit receive a taint from its vices."

The young man turned and gazed on him with inquiring eyes, as if still he did not comprehend what he meant.

"He was drowned," said the clergyman, "on Saturday last, while sailing with a party of pleasure on the Thames."

Philip fell down at his feet as senseless as if he had shot him.

CHAPTER II.

I must not long dwell upon the youthful scenes of the lad I have just introduced to the reader ; but as it is absolutely needful that his peculiar character should be clearly understood, I must suffer it to display itself a little farther before I step from his boyhood to his maturity.

We left Philip Hastings senseless upon the ground, at the feet of his old preceptor, struck down by the sudden intelligence he had received without warning or preparation.

The old man was immeasurably shocked

at what he had done, and he reproached himself bitterly ; but he had been a man of action all his life, who never suffered thought, whether pleasant or painful, to impede him. He could think while he acted. Being a strong man, too, he had no great difficulty in taking the slight, pale youth up in his arms, and carrying him over the park stile, which was close at hand, as the reader may remember. He made up his mind at once to bear his young charge to a small cottage belonging to a labourer on the other side of the road which ran under the park wall ; but on reaching it, he found that the whole family were out working in the fields, and both doors and windows were closed.

This was a great disappointment to him, although a very handsome house, in modern taste, was not two hundred yards off. But there were circumstances which made him unwilling to bear the son of Sir John

Hastings to the dwelling of his next neighbour. Next neighbours are not always friends; and even the clergyman of the parish may have his likings and dislikings.

Colonel Marshal and Sir John Hastings were political opponents. The latter was of the Calvinistic branch of the Church of England—not absolutely a non-juror, but suspected of having a tendency that way. He was sturdy and stiff in his political opinions, too, and had but small consideration for the conscientious views and sincere opinions of others. To say the truth, he was but little inclined to believe that any one who differed from him had conscientious views or sincere opinions at all; and certainly the demeanour, if not the conduct, of the worthy Colonel, did not betoken any fixed notion or strong principles. He was a man of the Court—gay, lively, even witty; making a jest of most things, however grave and worthy of reverence. He played high, generally won, was shrewd, complai-

sant, and particular in his deference to kings and prime ministers. Moreover, he was of the very highest of the High Church party—so high, indeed, that those who belonged to the Low Church party, fancied he must soon topple over into Catholicism.

In truth, I believe, had the heart of the Colonel been strictly examined, it would have been found empty of any thing like real religion. But then the king was a Roman Catholic, and it was pleasant to be as near him as possible.

It may be asked, why then did not the Colonel go the same length as his Majesty? The answer is very simple. Colonel Marshal was a shrewd observer of the signs of the times. At the card-table, after the three first cards were played, he could tell where every other card in the pack was placed. Now in politics he was nearly as discerning; and he perceived that, although King James had a great number of honors in his hand, he did not hold the trumps,

and would eventually lose the game. Had it been otherwise, there is no saying what sort of religion he might have adopted. There is no reason to think that Transubstantiation would have stood in the way at all; and as for the Council of Trent, he would have swallowed it like a roll for his breakfast.

For this man, then, Sir John Hastings had a thorough hatred and a profound contempt, and he extended the same sensations to every member of the family. In the estimation of the worthy old clergyman, the Colonel did not stand much higher; but he was more liberal towards the Colonel's family. Lady Annabella Marshal, his wife, was, when in the country, a very regular attendant at his church. She had been exceedingly beautiful, was still handsome, and had, moreover, a sweet, saint-like, placid expression, not untouched by melancholy, which was very winning, even in an old man's eyes. She was known, too, to have made a very good wife to a

not very good husband ; and, to say the truth, Doctor Paulding both pitied and esteemed her. He went but little to the house, indeed, for Colonel Marshal was odious to him ; and the Colonel returned the compliment by never going to the church.

Such were the reasons, which rendered the thought of carrying young Philip Hastings up to the Court—as Colonel Marshal's house was called—anything but agreeable to the good clergyman. But then, what could he do ? He looked in the boy's face. It was like that of a corpse. Not a sign of returning animation showed itself. He had heard of persons dying under such sudden affections of the mind ; and so still, so death-like, was the form and countenance before him, as he laid the lad down for a moment on a bench at the cottage door, that his heart misgave him, and a trembling feeling of dread came over his old frame. He hesitated no longer ; but, after a moment's pause to gain

breath, caught young Hastings up in his arms again, and hurried away with him towards Colonel Marshal's house.

I have said that it was a modern mansion: that is to imply, that it was modern in that day. Heaven only knows what has become of it now ; but Louis Quatorze, though he had no hand in the building of it, had many of its sins to answer for—and the rest belonged to Mansard. It was the strangest possible contrast to the old-fashioned country seat of Sir John Hastings, who had his joke at it, and at the owner also—for he, too, could jest in a bitter way—and he used to say that he wondered his neighbour had not added his own name to the building, to distinguish it from all other courts ; and then it would have been Court Marshal. Many were the windows of the house ; many the ornaments ; pilasters running up between the casements, with sunken panels, covered over with quaint wreaths

of flowers, as if each had an embroidered waistcoat on ; and a large flight of steps running down from the great doorway, decorated with Cupids, and cornucopias overflowing with the most indigestible kind of stone-fruit.

The path from the gates up to the house was well gravelled, and ran in and out amongst sundry parterres, and basins of water, with the Tritons, &c., of the age, all spouting away as hard as a large reservoir on the top of the neighbouring slope could make them. But for serviceable purposes these basins were vain, as the water was never suffered to rise nearly to the brim ; and good Doctor Paulding gazed on them without hope, as he passed on towards the broad flight of steps.

There, however, he found something of a more comfortable aspect. The path he had been obliged to take had one convenience to the dwellers in the mansion. Every window in that side of the house com-

manded a view of it, and the doctor and his burden were seen by one pair of eyes at least.

Running down the steps without any of the frightful appendages of the day upon her head, but her own bright, beautiful hair curling wild like the tendrils of a vine, came a lovely girl of fourteen or fifteen, just past the uncouth age, and blushing in the spring of womanhood. Eagerness and some alarm were in her face ; for the air and haste of the worthy clergyman, as well as the figure he carried in his arms, spoke as plainly as words could do that some accident had happened ; and she called to him to ask what was the matter.

"Matter, child, matter !" cried the clergyman. "I believe I have half killed this poor boy."

"Killed him !" exclaimed the girl, with a look of doubt as well as surprise.

"Ay, Mistress Rachael," replied the old man, "killed him, by unkindly and

rashly telling him of his brother's death, without preparation."

"You intended it for kind, I am sure," murmured the girl in a sweet low tone, coming down the steps, and gazing on his pale face, while the clergyman carried the lad up the steps.

"There, Miss Marshal, do not stay staring," said Doctor Paulding; "but pray call some of the lackeys, and bid them bring water or hartshorn, or any restorative. Your lady-mother must have some essences to bring folks out of swoons. There is nothing but swooning at Court, I am told—except gaming, and drinking, and profanity."

The girl was already on her way, but she looked back, saying,

"My father and mother are both out; but I will soon find help."

When the lad opened his eyes, there was something very near which seemed to him exceedingly beautiful—rich, warm colouring, like that of a sunny landscape; a pair

of liquid, tender eyes, deeply fringed and full of sympathy ; while sunny curls of bright brown hair played about his cheek, moved by the hay-field breath of the sweet lips that bent close over him.

“ Where am I ? ” he said. “ What is the matter ? What has happened ? Ah ! now I recollect. My brother—my poor brother. Was it a dream ? ”

“ Hush, hush ! ” ejaculated a musical voice. “ Talk to him, sir. Talk to him ; and make him still.”

“ It is but too true, my dear Philip,” said the old clergyman ; “ your brother is lost to us. But recollect yourself, my son. It is weak to give way in this manner. I announced your misfortune somewhat suddenly, it is true, trusting that your philosophy was stronger than it is—your Christian fortitude. Remember, all these dispensations are from the hand of the most merciful God. He who gives the sunshine, shall he not bring the clouds ? Doubt not that all is merciful ; and suffer

not the manifestations of His will to find you unprepared or unsubmitive."

"I have been very weak," said the young man; "but it was so sudden! Heaven! how full of health and strength he looked when he went away! He was the picture of life—almost of immortality. I was but as a reed beside him—a weak, feeble reed, beside a sapling oak."

"'One shall be taken, and the other left,'" said the sweet voice of the young girl. And the eyes, both of the youth and the old clergyman, turned suddenly upon her.

Philip Hastings raised himself upon his arm, and seemed to meditate for a moment or two. His thoughts were confused and indistinct. He knew not well where he was. The impression of what had happened was vague and indefinite. As eyes which have been seared by the lightning, his mind, which had lost the too vivid impression, now perceived everything in mist and confusion.

"I have been very weak," he said, "too

weak. It is strange! I thought myself firmer. What is the use of thought and example, if the mind remains thus feeble? But I am better now. I will never yield thus again."

Flinging himself off the sofa on which they had laid him, he stood for a moment on his feet, gazing round upon the old clergyman and that beautiful young girl, and two or three servants who had been called to minister to him.

We all know—at least, all who have dealt with the fiery things of life—all who have felt and suffered, and struggled and conquered, and yielded and grieved, and triumphed in the end—we all know how short-lived are the first conquests of mind over body, and how much strength and experience it requires to make the victory complete. To render the soul the despot, the tyranny must be habitual.

Philip Hastings rose, as I have said, and gazed around him. He struggled against the shock which his mere animal nature

had received, shattered as it had been by long and intense study, and neglect of all that contributes to corporeal power. But everything grew hazy to his eyes again. He felt his limbs weak and powerless ; even his mind feeble, and his thoughts confused. Before he knew what was coming, he sank fainting on the sofa again, and when he woke from the dull sort of trance into which he had fallen, other faces were around him : he was stretched quietly in bed in a strange room ; a physician and a beautiful lady of mature years were standing by his bed-side ; and he felt the oppressive lassitude of fever in every nerve and in every limb.

But we must turn to good Doctor Paulding. He went back to his rectory, discontented with himself, leaving the lad in the care of Lady Annabella Marshal, and her family. The ordinary—as the man who carried the letters was frequently called in those days—was to depart in an hour, and he knew that Sir John Hastings expected

his only remaining son in London to attend the body of his brother down to the family burying-place. It was impossible that the lad could go; and the old clergyman had to sit down and write an account of what had occurred.

There was nothing upon earth, or beyond the earth, which would have induced him to tell a lie. True, his mind might be subject to such self-deceptions as the minds of all other men. He might be induced to find excuses to his own conscience for any thing he did that was wrong—for any mistake or error in judgment ; for, wilfully, he never did that what was wrong ; and it was only by the results that he knew it. Yet he was eagerly, painfully, upon his guard against himself. He knew the weakness of human nature—he had dealt with it often, and observed it shrewdly, and applied the lesson with bitter severity to his own heart, detecting its shrinking from candour, its hankering after self-defence, its misty prejudices, its turnings

and windings to escape conviction : and he dealt with it as hardly as he would have done with a spoiled child.

Calmly and deliberately he sat down to write to Sir John Hastings a full account of what had occurred, taking more blame to himself than was really his due. I have called it a full account, though it occupied but one page of paper, for the good doctor was anything but profuse of words ; and there are some men who can say much in small space. He blamed himself greatly, anticipating reproach ; but the thing which he feared the most to communicate was the fact that the lad was left ill at the house of Colonel Marshal—the house of a man so very much disliked by Sir John Hastings.

Some men—men of strong mind and great abilities—go through life learning a few of its lessons, and totally neglecting others—pre-occupied by one branch of the great study, and seeing nothing in the course of scholarship but that. Doctor Paulding had no conception of the change

which the loss of their eldest son had wrought in the hearts of Sir John and Lady Hastings. The second—the neglected one—had now become not only the eldest, but the only, child. His illness, painfully as it affected them, was a blessing to them. It withdrew their thoughts from their late bereavement. It occupied their minds with a new anxiety. It withdrew it from grief and from disappointment. They thought little or nothing of whose house he was at, or whose care he was under ; but, leaving the body of their dead child to be brought down by slow and solemn procession to the country, they hurried on before, to watch over the one that was left.

Sir John Hastings utterly forgot his ancient feelings towards Colonel Marshal. He was at the house every day, and almost all day long, and Lady Hastings was there day and night.

Wonderful how — when barriers are broken down—we see the objects brought into proximity under a totally different

point of view from that in which we beheld them at a distance. There might be some stiffness in the first meeting of Colonel Marshal and Sir John Hastings, but it wore off with exceeding rapidity. The Colonel's kindness and attention to the sick youth were marked. Lady Annabella devoted herself to him as to one of her own children. Rachael Marshal made herself a mere nurse. Hard hearts only could withstand such things. Philip was now an only child, and the parents were filled with gratitude and affection.

CHAPTER III.

THE stone which covered the vault of the Hastings family had been raised, and light and air let into the cold, damp interior. A ray of sunshine, streaming through the church window, found its way across the mouldy velvet of the old coffins as they stood ranged along in solemn order, containing the dust of many ancestors of the present possessors of the manor. There, too, apart from the rest, were the coffins of those who had died childless ; the small

narrow resting-place of childhood, where the guileless infant, the father's and mother's joy and hope, slept its last sleep, leaving tearful eyes and sorrowing hearts behind, with nought to comfort but the blessed thought that by calling such from earth, God peoples heaven with angels ; the coffins, too, of those cut off in the early spring of manhood, whom the fell mower had struck down in the flower before the fruit was ripe. Oh, how his scythe levels the blossoming fields of hope ! There, too, lay the stern old soldier, whose life had been given up to his country's service, and who would not spare one thought or moment to domestic joys ; and many another who, perhaps, had loved, and passed away without receiving love's reward.

Amongst these, close at the end of the line, stood two tressels, ready for a fresh occupant of the tomb, and the church bell tolled dismally above, while the old sexton looked forth from the door of the church towards the gates of the park, and the

heavy, clouded sky, seemed to menace rain.

“Happy the bride the sun shines upon ; happy the corpse the heaven rains upon !” said the old man to himself. But the rain did not come down ; and presently, from the spot where he stood, which overlooked the park wall, he saw approach, in slow and solemn procession, along the great road to the gates, the funeral train of the late heir to all the fine property around. The body had been brought from London, after the sudden and violent stoppage of the career of youth in a moment of giddy pleasure ; and father and mother, as was then customary, with a long line of friends, relations, and dependents, now conveyed the remains of him once so dearly loved to the cold grave.

Only one of all the numerous connections of the family was wanting on this occasion, and that was the brother of the dead ; but he lay slowly recovering from the shock he had received, and every per-

son present had been told that it was impossible for him to attend. All the rest of the family had hastened to the hall in answer to the summons they had received ; for though Sir John Hastings was not much loved, he was highly respected, and somewhat feared—at least, the deference which was paid to him, no one well knew why, savoured of dread.

It is a strange propensity in many old persons to hang about the grave to which they are rapidly tending, when it is opened for another, and to comment—sometimes even with a bitter pleasantry—upon an event which must speedily overtake themselves. As soon as it was known that the funeral procession had set out from the hall-door, a number of aged people, principally women, but comprising one or two shrivelled men, tottered forth from the cottages, which lay scattered about the church, and made their way into the church-yard, there to hold conference upon the dead and the living.

"Ay, ay," said one old woman, "he has been taken at an early time ; but he was a fine lad, and better than most of those hard people."

"Peggy would praise the devil himself if he were dead," said an old man, leaning on a stick, "though she has never a good word for the living. The boy is taken away from mischief—that is the truth of it. If he had lived to come down here again, he would have broken the heart of my niece's daughter, Jane, or made a public shame of her. What business had a gentleman's son like that to be always hanging about a poor cottage girl, following her into the corn-fields, and luring her out in the evenings?"

"Faith! she might have been proud enough of his notice," said an old crone ; "and, I dare say, she was, too, in spite of all your conceit, Matthew. She is not so dainty as you pretend to be ; and we may see something come of it yet."

"At all events," said another, "he was better than this white-faced, spiritless boy that is left, who is likely enough to be taken earlier than his brother, for he looks as if a breath would blow him away."

"He will live to do something yet, that will make people talk of him," said a woman, older than any of the rest, but taller and straighter; "there is a spirit in him, be it angel or devil, that is not for death so soon."

"Ah! they're making a pomp of it, I warrant," observed another old woman, fixing her eyes on the high road under the park wall, upon which the procession now entered. "Marry, there are 'scutcheons enough, and coats of arms! One would think he was a Lord's son, with all this to do! But there is a curse upon the race, any how. This man was the last of eleven brothers, and, I have heard say, his father died a bad death. Now his eldest son must die by drowning—saved the hang-

man something, perchance: we shall see what comes of the one that is left. 'Tis a curse upon them ever since Worcester fight, when the old man, who is dead and gone, advised to send the poor fellows who were taken, to work as slaves in the colonies."

As she spoke, the funeral procession advanced up the road, and approached that curious sort of gate, with a penthouse over it, erected, probably, to shelter the clergyman of the church while receiving the corpse at the gate of the burial-ground, which was then universally to be found at the entrance to all cemeteries. The old woman broke off abruptly, as if there was something still on her mind, which she had not spoken; and, ranging themselves on each side of the church-yard path, the old men and women formed a lane, down which good Doctor Paulding speedily moved, book in hand. The assembled people, whose numbers had been increased by the arrival of thirty or forty, young and

middle-aged, said not a word as the clergyman moved on ; but when the body had passed up between them, and the bereaved father followed as chief-mourner, with a fixed, stern, but tearless eye, betokening more intense affliction, perhaps, in a man of his character, than if his cheeks had been covered with drops of womanly sorrow, several voices were heard saying, aloud—

“God bless and comfort you, Sir John !”

Strange, marvellously strange it was, that these words should come from tongues, and from those alone, which, a moment before, had been so busily engaged in carping censure and unfeeling sneers. It was the old men and women alone who had just been commenting bitterly upon the fate, history, and character of the family, who now uttered the unfelt expressions of sympathy in a beggar-like, whining tone. Those who really felt compassion, said nothing.

The coffin had been carried into the church, and the solemn rites, the beautiful service of the Church of England, had proceeded some way, when another person was added to the congregation who had not at first been there. All eyes, but those of the father of the dead and the lady who sat weeping by his side, turned upon the new-comer, as, with a face as pale as death, and a faltering step, he took his place on one of the benches somewhat remote from the rest. There was an expression of feeble lassitude in the young man's countenance, but of strong resolution, which overcame the weakness of the frame. He looked as if each moment he would have fainted ; but yet he sat out the whole service of the Church, mingled with the crowd when the body was lowered into the vault, and saw the handful of earth hurled out upon the velvet coffin, as if in mockery of the empty pride of all the pomp and circumstance which attended the burial of the rich and high.

No tear came into his eyes—no sob escaped from his bosom ; a slight quivering of the lip alone betrayed that there was strong agitation within. When all was over, and while the father still gazed down into the vault, the young lad crept quietly back into the pew, covered his face with his hand, and wept.

The last rite was over. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, were committed. Sir John Hastings drew his wife's arm through his own, and walked with a heavy, steadfast and unwavering step down the aisle. Every body drew back respectfully as he passed ; for generally, even in the hardest hearts, true sorrow finds reverence. He had descended the steps from the church into the burying ground, and had passed half way along the path towards his carriage, when suddenly the tall upright old woman, whom I have mentioned, thrust herself in his way, and addressed him with a cold look and somewhat menacing tone.

"Now, Sir John Hastings," she said, "will you do me justice about that bit of land? By your son's grave I ask it. The hand of Heaven has smitten you. It may, perhaps, have touched your heart. You know the land is mine. It was taken from my husband by the usurper, because he fought for the King to whom he had pledged his faith. It was given to your father, because he broke his faith to his King and brought evil days upon his country. Will you give me back the land, I say? Out, man! It is but a garden of herbs; but it is mine, and in God's sight I claim it!"

"Away, out of my path!" exclaimed Sir John Hastings, angrily. "Is this a time to talk of such things? Get you gone, I say, and choose some better hour. Do you suppose I can listen to you now?"

"You have never listened, and you never will," replied the old woman; and, suffering him to pass without further opposition,

she remained upon the path behind him, muttering what seemed curses bitter and deep, but the words of which were audible only to herself.

The little crowd gathered round her, and listened eagerly to catch the sense of what she said ; but the moment after, the old sexton laid his hand upon her shoulder and pushed her from the path, ejaculating,

“Get along with you, get along with you, Popish beldam ! What business have you here, scandalizing the congregation, and brawling at the church door ? You should be put in the stocks !”

“I pity you, old worm !” retorted the crone. “You will be soon among those you feed upon.”

And, with a hanging head and dejected air, she quitted the church-yard.

In the meanwhile, Doctor Paulding remained gazing down into the vault, while the stout young men who had come to assist the sexton, withdrew the broad

hempen bands by which the coffin had been lowered, from beneath it, arranged it properly upon the tressels in its orderly place among the dead ; and then mounted by a ladder into the body of the church again, preparing to replace the stone over the mouth of the vault.

Turning to the church-door, and looking out, the reverend gentleman then quietly approached a pew in the side aisle.

“ Philip, this is very wrong,” he said ; “ your father never wished or intended you should be here.”

“ He did not forbid me,” returned the young man. “ Why should *I* only be absent from my brother’s funeral ?”

“ Because you are sick. Because, by coming, you may have risked your life,” rejoined the old clergyman.

“ What is life to a duty ?” demanded the lad. “ Have you not taught me, sir, that there is no earthly thing—no interest of this life, no pleasure, no happiness, no

hope—that ought not to be sacrificed at once to that which the heart says is right ?”

“True—true,” answered the old clergyman, almost impatiently ; “but in following precept so severely, boy, you should use some discrimination. You have a duty to a living father, which is of more weight than a mere imaginary one to a dead brother. You could do no good to the latter. As the Psalmist wisely said, ‘ You must go to him, but he can never come back to you.’ To your father, on the contrary, you have high duties to perform ; to console and cheer him in his present affliction ; to comfort and support his declining years. When a real duty presents itself—a duty to yourself, to your fellow men, to your country, or to your God—I say again, as I have often said, do it in spite of every possible affection. Let it cut through everything, break through every tie, thrust aside every consideration.

There, indeed, I would fain see you act the old Roman, whom you are so fond of studying, and be a Cato or a Brutus, if you will. But you must be very sure that you do not make your fancy create unreal duties, and render them of greater importance in your eyes than the true ones. But now I must get you back as speedily as possible; for your mother and father, ere long, will be up to see you, and they must not find you absent on this errand."

The lad made no reply, but readily walked back towards the court with Doctor Paulding, though his steps were slow and feeble. He took the old man's arm, too, and leaned heavily upon it; for, to say the truth, he felt already the consequences of the foolish act he had committed; and, the first excitement being past, lassitude and fever took possession once more of every limb, and his feet would hardly bear him to the gates.

The beautiful girl who had been the first to receive him at that house, met the eyes both of the young man, and the old

one, the moment they entered the gardens. She looked wild and anxious, and was wandering about with her head uncovered ; but, as soon as she beheld the youth, she ran towards him, exclaiming—

“Oh, Philip, Philip ! this is very wrong and cruel of you. I have been looking for you everywhere. You should not have done this. How could you let him, Doctor Paulding ?”

“I did not let him, my dear child,” replied the old man ; “he came of his own will. But take him in with you ; send him to bed as speedily as may be ; give him a large glass of the fever-water he was taking, and say as little as possible of this rash act to any one.”

The girl made the sick boy lean upon her rounded arm, led him away into the house, and tended him like a sister. She kept the secret of his rashness, too, from every one ; and feelings sprang up in his bosom towards her during the next few hours which were never to be obliterated.

She was so beautiful, so tender, so gentle, so full of all womanly graces, that he fancied, with his strong imagination, that no one perfection of body or mind could be wanting; and he continued to think so for many a long year after

CHAPTER IV.

ENOUGH of boyhood, and its faults and follies. I sought but to show the reader, as in a glass, the back of a pageant that has past. Oh, how I sometimes laugh at the critics—God save the mark!—who see no more in the slight sketch I choose to give, than a mere daub of paint across the canvas, though that one touch gives effect to the whole picture. Let them stand back, and view it as a whole ; and if they can find nought in it to make them exclaim,

"Well done!" let them look at the frame. That is enough for them.

I have given you, reader, a sketch of the boy, that you may be enabled to judge rightly of the man. Now, take the lad as I have moulded him—take him well in the fiery furnace of strong passion, remembering still that the form is of hard iron—quench and harden him in the cold waters of opposition, and disappointment, and anxiety—and bring him forth tempered, but too highly, for the world he has to live in ; not pliable—not elastic ; no watch-spring, but, like a graver's tool, which must cut into everything opposed to it, or break under the pressure.

Let us start upon our new course some fifteen years after the period at which our tale began, and view Philip Hastings as that which he had now become.

Doctor Paulding had passed from this working-day world, to another and a better—where we hope the virtues of the heart may be weighed against the vices of the head

—a mode of dealing rare here below. Sir John Hastings and his wife had gone whither their eldest son had gone before them; and Philip Hastings was no longer a boy. Manhood had set its seal upon his brow only too early; but what a change had come with manhood!—a change not in the substance, but in its mode.

Oh, Time! thy province is not only to destroy! Thou worker-out of human destinies—thou new-fashioner of all things earthly—thou blender of races—thou changer of institutions—thou discoverer—thou concealer—thou builder-up—thou dark destroyer!—thy waters as they flow have sometimes a petrifying, sometimes a solvent power, hardening the soft, melting the strong, accumulating the sand, undermining the rock! What had been thine effect upon Philip Hastings?

All the thoughts had grown manly as well as the body. The slight youth had been developed into the hardy and powerful man; rather inactive—at least so it

seemed to common eyes—more thoughtful than brilliant, steady in resolution, though calm in expression, giving way no more to bursts of boyish feeling, somewhat stern, men said somewhat hard, but yet extremely just, and resolute for justice. The poetry of life—I should have said the poetry of young life—the brilliancy of fancy and hope, seemed dimmed in him: mark, I say *seemed*; for that which *seems* too often is *not*; and he might, perhaps, have learnt to rule and conceal feelings which he could not altogether conquer.

Still, many traces of his old self were visible; the same love of study, the same choice of books and subjects of thought, the same subdued yet strong enthusiasms. The very fact of mingling with the world, which had taught him to repress those enthusiasms, seemed to have concentrated and rendered them more intense.

The course of his studies; the habits of his mind; his fondness for the school of

the Stoics, it might have been supposed, would rather have disgusted him with the society in which he now habitually mingled, and have made him look upon mankind—for it was a very corrupt age—with contempt, if not with horror.

Such, however, was not the case. He had less of the cynic in him than his father; indeed, he had nothing of the cynic in him at all. He loved mankind in his own peculiar way. He was a philanthropist of a certain sort; and would willingly have put a considerable portion of his fellow-creatures to death, in order to serve, and elevate, and improve the rest.

His was a remarkable character—not altogether fitted for the times in which he lived; but one which, in its wild and rugged strength, commanded much respect and admiration. Weak things clung to it, as ivy to an oak or a strong wall; and its power over them was increased by a certain sort of tenderness—a protecting pity—which mingled strangely with his harder

and ruder qualities. He seemed to be sorry for everything that was weak, and to seek to console and comfort it, under the curse of feebleness.

He was capable, too, of intense and strong affections, though he could not extend them to many objects. All that was vigorous and powerful in him concentrated itself in separate points here and there ; and general things were viewed with much indifference.

See him as he walks up and down there before the old house already described. He has grown tall and powerful in frame ; and yet his gait is somewhat slovenly and negligent, although his step is firm and strong. He is not much more than thirty-one years of age ; but he looks forty at the least ; and his hair is even thickly sprinkled with grey. His face is pale, with some strong marked lines and indentations in it ; yet, on the whole, it is handsome, and the slight habitual frown, thoughtful rather than stern, together with the massive jaw, and

the slight drawing down of the corners of the mouth, give it an expression of resolute firmness, contradicted only by the frequent variation of the eye, sometimes full of deep thought, sometimes of tenderness, and sometimes flashing with a wild and almost supernatural fire.

But a lady is hanging on his arm which supports her rather feeble steps. She seems recovering from illness ; the rose in her cheek is faint and delicate ; and an air of languor is in her whole face and form. Yet she is very beautiful, and seems fully ten years younger than her husband, although, in truth, she is of the same age—or perhaps a little older.

It is Rachael Marshal, now become Lady Hastings.

Their union did not take place without opposition ; all the prejudices of Sir John Hastings against the Marshal family revived as soon as his son's attachment to the daughter of the house became apparent. Like most fathers, he saw too

late ; and then sought to prevent that which had become inevitable. He sent his son to travel in foreign lands ; he even laid out a scheme for marrying him to another, younger, and, as he thought, fairer. He contrived that the young man should fall into the society of the lady he had selected, and he fancied that would be quite sufficient ; for he saw in her character, young as she was, traits, much more harmonious, as he fancied, with those of his son, than could be found in the softer, gentler, weaker, Rachael Marshal. There was energy, perseverance, resolution, keen and quick perceptions—perhaps a little too much keenness. More, he did not stay to enquire ; but, as is usual in matters of the heart, Philip Hastings loved best the converse of himself. The progress of the scheme was interrupted by the illness of Sir John Hastings, which recalled his son from Rome. Philip returned, found his father dead, and married Rachael Marshal.

They had had several children ; but only

one remained: that gay, light, gossamer girl, like a gleam darting along the path from sunny rays piercing through wind-borne clouds. On she ran with a careless step; yet every now and then she paused suddenly, gazed earnestly at a flower, plucked it, pored into its very heart with her deep eyes, and, after seeming to labour under thought for a moment, sprang forward again as light as ever.

The eyes of the father followed her with a look of grave, thoughtful, intense affection. The mother's eyes looked up to him, and then glanced onward to the child, now between nine and ten years old. She was not very handsome, for it is not a handsome age. Yet there were indications of future beauty—fine and sparkling eyes—rich, waving, silky hair—long eye-lashes, a fine complexion, and a light and graceful figure, though deformed by the stiff fashions of the day.

There was a sparkle, too, in her look—that bright outpouring of the heart upon

the face which is one of the most powerful charms of youth and innocence. Ah! how gone by! How soon checked by the thousand loads which this heavy, labouring world casts upon the buoyancy of youthful spirits. The chilling conventionality—the knowledge and the fear of wrong—the first taste of sorrow—the anxieties, cares, fears—even the hopes—of mature life are all weights to bear down the pinions of young, lark-like joy. After twenty, does the heart ever rise up from her green sod, and sing at Heaven's gate as in childhood? Never—ah, never! The dust of earth is upon the wing of the sky-songster, and will never let her mount to her ancient pitch.

That child was a strange combination of her father and her mother. She was destined to be their only child; and it seemed as if nature had taken pleasure in blending the characters of both in one. Not that they were intimately mingled, but that they

seemed, like the twins of Latona, to rise and set by turns.

In her morning walk ; in her hours of sportive play, when no subject of deep thought, no matter that affected the heart or the imagination, was presented to her, she was light and gay as a butterfly : the child—the happy child—was in every look, and word, and movement. But call her for a moment from this bright land of pleasantness—present something to her mind, or to her fancy, capable of rousing sympathies, or setting the thoughts at work,—and she was grave, meditative, studious, deep beyond her years.

She was a subject of much contemplation, some anxiety, some wonder, to her father. The brightness of her perceptions, her eagerness in the pursuit of knowledge, her vigorous resolution, even as a child, when convinced that she was right, shewed him his own mind reflected in hers. Even her tenderness, her strong affections, he could

comprehend, for the same were in his own heart ; and though he believed them to be weaknesses, he could well understand their existence in a child and in a woman.

But that which he did *not* understand—that which made him marvel—was her lightness, her gaiety, her wild vivacity—I might almost say, her trifling—when not moved by deep feeling or chained down by thought.

This was beyond him. Yet strange! the same characteristics did not surprise or shock him in her mother—never had surprised or shocked him ; indeed he had rather loved her for those qualities, so unlike his own. Perhaps it was that he thought it strange that his child should, in any mood, be so unlike himself ; or perhaps it was the contrast between the two sides of the same character that moved his wonder when he saw it in his child. He might forget that her mother was her parent as well as himself ; and that she had a spiritual inheritance from each.

In his thoughtful, considering, theoretical way, he determined studiously to seek a remedy for what he considered a defect in his child—to cultivate with all the zeal and perseverance of paternal affection, supported by his own force of character, those qualities which were most like his own—those, in short, which were the least womanly. But Nature would not be baffled. You may divert her to a certain degree ; but you cannot turn her aside from her course altogether.

He found that he could not—by any means which his heart would let him employ—conquer what he called the frivolity of the child. Frivolity ! Heaven save us ! There were times when she showed no frivolity, but, on the contrary a depth and intensity far, far beyond her years. Indeed, the ordinary current of her mind was calm and thoughtful. It was only when a breeze rippled it, that it sparkled on the surface. Her father, too, saw that this was so ; that the wild gaiety was but occa-

sional. Still, it surprised and pained him—perhaps the more because it was occasional. It seemed to his eyes an anomaly in her nature. He would have had her altogether like himself. He could not conceive any one possessing so much of his own character, having room in heart and brain for aught else. It was a subject of constant wonder to him ; of speculation, of anxious thought.

He often asked himself if this was the only anomaly in his child—if there were not other traits, yet undiscovered, as discrepant, as this light volatility, with her general character : and he puzzled himself sorely.

Still, he pursued her education upon his own principles ; taught her many things which women rarely learned in those days ; imbued her mind with thoughts and feelings of his own ; and often imagined, when a season of peculiar gravity fell upon her, that he made progress in rendering her character all that he could wish it. This

impression never lasted long, however ; for, sooner or later, the bird-like spirit within her found the cage-door open, and fluttered forth upon some gay excursion, leaving all his dreams vanished and his wishes disappointed.

Nevertheless, he loved her with all the strong affection of which his nature was capable ; and still he persevered in the course which he thought for her benefit. At times, indeed, he would make efforts to unravel the mystery of her double nature ; not perceiving that the only cause of mystery was in himself : that what seemed strange in his daughter, depended more upon his own want of power to comprehend her variety, than upon anything extraordinary in her. He would endeavour to go along with her in her sportive mood : to let his mind run free beside hers in its gay ramble : to find for these aberrations some motive which he could understand : to reduce them to a system : to discover the rule by which the problem was to be

solved. But he made nothing of it, and wearied conjecture in vain.

Lady Hastings sometimes interposed a little ; for in all important things she had great influence with her husband. He let her have her own way wherever he thought it not worth while to oppose her ; and that was very often. She perfectly comprehended the side of her daughter's character which was all darkness to the father ; and, strange to say, with greater penetration than his own, she comprehended the other side likewise. She recognised easily the traits in her child which she knew and admired in her husband, but wished them heartily away in her daughter's case, thinking such strength of mind, joined with whatever grace and sweetness, somewhat unfeminine.

Though she was full of prejudices, and, where her quickness of perception failed her, altogether unteachable by reason, yet she was naturally too virtuous and good to

attempt even to thwart the objects of the father's efforts in the education of his child. I have said that she interfered at times ; but it was only to remonstrate against too close study—to obtain frequent and healthful relaxation—and to add, all those womanly accomplishments on which she set great value. In this she was not opposed. Instrumental music and singing, (under the tuition of an Italian) dancing, and a knowledge of modern languages, were added to other branches of education ; and Lady Hastings was so far satisfied.

CHAPTER V.

THE Italian singing-master was a peculiar man, and well worthy a few words in description. He was tall and thin, but well built ; and his face had probably once been very handsome, in that Italian style which, by the exaggeration of age, grows so soon into ugliness. The nose was large and conspicuous ; the eyes bright, black, and twinkling ; the mouth good in shape, but with an animal expression about it ; the ear very voluminous.

He was somewhat more than fifty years of age, and his hair was speckled with grey; but age was not apparent in wrinkles and furrows, and in gait he was firm and upright.

At first Sir Philip Hastings did not like him at all. He did not like to have him there. It was against the grain that he admitted him into the house. He did it, partly because he thought it right to yield in some degree to the wishes of his wife, partly from a grudging deference to the customs of society.

But the Signor was a shrewd and world-taught man, accustomed to overcome prejudices, and to make his way against disadvantages; and he soon established himself well in the opinion of both father and mother. It was done by a peculiar process, which is worth the consideration of all those who seek *les moyens de parvenir*.

In his general and ordinary intercourse with his fellow men, he had a happy middle tone—a grave, reticent manner, which

never compromised him to anything. A shrewd smile, without an elucidatory word, served to harmonise him with the gay and vivacious : a serious tranquillity, unaccompanied by any public professions, was enough to make the sober and the decent rank him amongst themselves. Perhaps that class of men—whether pure at heart or not—have always over-estimated decency of exterior.

All this was in public, however. In private—in a *tete-à-tete*—Signor Guardini was a very different man. Nay, more ; in each and every *tete-à-tete*, he was a different man from what he appeared in the other. Yet, with a marvellous art, he contrived to make both sides of his apparent character harmonise with his public and open appearances ; or rather, perhaps, I should say, that his public demeanour was a sort of middle tint, which served to harmonise the opposite extremes of colouring displayed by his character. Nothing could exemplify this more strongly than the

different impressions he produced upon Sir Philip and Lady Hastings. The lady was soon won to his side. She was predisposed to favour him ; and a few light, gay sallies, a great deal of conventional talk about the fashionable life of London, and a cheerful, bantering tone of *persiflage*, completely charmed her. Sir Philip was more difficult to win. Nevertheless, in a few short sentences, hardly longer than those which Sterne's mendicant whispered in the ear of the lady passengers, he succeeded in disarming many prejudices. With Sir Philip he was a stoic : he had some tincture of letters, though a singer ; and had read sufficient of the history of his own land to catch all the salient points of the glorious past.

Perhaps he might even feel a certain interest in the noble antecedents of his decrepid country—not to influence his conduct, or to plant ambitions, or to nourish pure and high hopes for its regeneration—but to waken a sort of touchwood enthusi-

asm which glowed brightly when fanned by the stronger powers of others. Yet, before Sir Philip had had time to communicate to him one spark of his own ardour, he had, as I have said, made great progress in his esteem. In five minutes' conversation, he had established for himself the character of one of a higher and nobler character, whose lot had fallen in evil days.

"In other years," thought the English gentleman, "this might have been a great man—the defender unto death of his country's rights—the advocate of all that is ennobling, stern, and grand."

What was the secret of all this? Simply, that he, a man nearly without character, had a keen, an almost intuitive, perception of the character of others; and that, without difficulty, his pliable nature and easy principles could accommodate themselves to all.

He made great progress in the regard of Sir Philip, although their conversation seldom lasted above five minutes at a time.

He made greater progress still with the mother. But with the daughter he made more—worse than more.

What was the cause? it may be asked. What did he do or say? How did he demean himself so as to produce in her bosom a feeling of horror and disgust towards him that nothing could remove?

I cannot tell. He was a man of strong passions and no principles: his after—perhaps his 'previous—life evinced this. There is a touchstone for pure gold in the heart of an innocent and high-minded woman, that detects all baser metals: they are discovered in a moment: they cannot stand the test.

Now, whether his heart-cankering corruption, his want of faith, honesty, and truth, made themselves felt, and were pointed out by the index of that fine barometer, without any overt act at all—or whether he gave actual cause of offence,—I do not know; none has ever known.

Suddenly, however, the gay—the apparently somewhat wayward—girl, now between fifteen and sixteen, assumed a new character in her father's and mother's eyes. With a strange, frank abruptness, she told them she would take no more singing-lessons of the Italian; but she added no explanation.

Lady Hastings was angry, and expostulated warmly; but the girl was firm and resolute. She heard her mother's arguments, and answered, in soft and humble tones, that she could not—*would not*—learn to sing any longer; that she was sorry to grieve or offend her mother; but she had learned long enough, and would learn no more.

With the air of indignant pride—in which weakness so often takes refuge, the mother quitted the room; and the father then in a calmer spirit inquired the cause of her resolution.

She blushed like the early morning sky;

but a sort of bewildered look was upon her face as she replied,

“ I know no cause—I can give no reason, my dear father ; but the man is hateful to me. I will never see him again.”

Her father sought for further explanation ; but he could obtain none. Guardini had not said anything, nor done anything, she admitted, to give her offence ; and yet she firmly refused to be his pupil any longer.

There are instincts in fine and delicate minds, which, by signs and indications, untransferable to coarser natures, discover in others thoughts and feelings, wishes and designs, discordant, repugnant, to themselves. They are instincts, I say, not amenable to reason, escaping analysis, incapable of explanation—the warning voice of God in the heart, bidding it “ Beware of vice.”

Sir Philip Hastings was not a man to allow for such impulses—to conceive or

understand them in the least. He had been accustomed to delude himself with reasons, some just, others very much the reverse ; but he had never done a deed, or entertained a thought, for which he could not give some reason of convincing power to his own mind.

He did not in the least understand his daughter's conduct, but he forbore to press her any further. She was, in some degree, a mysterious being to him—indeed, as I have before shown, she had always been a mystery ; he had no key to her character in his own. It was written in an unknown language.

Yet, did he love or cherish her the less ? Oh, no ! Perhaps a deeper interest gathered round his heart for her, the chief object of his affections. More strongly than ever, he determined to cultivate and form her mind on his own model, in consequence of what he called a strange caprice, although he could not but sometimes hope

and fancy that her resolute rejection of any farther lessons from Signor Guardini arose from her distaste for what he himself looked upon as one of the frivolous pursuits of fashion.

Yet she showed no distaste for singing. For hours every day she would practise eagerly, till her sweet voice, under a delicate taste, acquired a flexibility and power which charmed and captivated her father, notwithstanding his would-be cynicism. He was naturally fond of music; his nature was a vehement one, though curbed by strong restraints; and all vehement natures are much moved by music. He would sit calmly, with his eyes fixed upon a book, seeming to read, but listening all the time to that sweet voice, with feelings working in him—emotions, thrilling, deep, intense,—which he would have felt ashamed to expose to any human eye.

All this, however, made her conduct toward Guardini the more mysterious; and

her father often gazed upon her beautiful face with a look of doubting inquiry, as we may look on the surface of a bright lake, and ask, "What is below?"

That face was now indeed becoming very beautiful. Every feature had been refined and softened by time; there was soul in the eyes, and a gleam of Heaven upon the smile, besides the mere beauties of line and colouring. The form, too, had nearly reached perfection. It was full of symmetry, and grace, and budding charms; and while the mother marked all these attractions, and thought how powerful they would prove in the world, the father felt their influence in a different manner: with a sort of abstract admiration of her loveliness, which went no further than proud acknowledgment to his own heart that she was beautiful indeed. To him, her beauty was as a gem, a picture, an exquisite possession, which he had no thought of ever parting with; something on which his

eyes would rest well pleased till they closed for ever. How blest he might have been in the possession of such a child, could he have comprehended her—could he have divested his mind of the idea that there was something strange and inharmonious in her character. Could he have made his heart a woman's heart only for one hour, all mystery would have been dissolved ; but that was impossible, and it remained.

No tangible effect did it produce at the time ; but preconceptions of another's character are very dangerous things. Everything is seen through their medium—everything is coloured and often distorted. That which produced no early fruit had important results at an after period.

But I must turn now to other scenes and more stirring events ; having, I trust, made the reader well enough acquainted with father, mother, and daughter ; at least

sufficiently for all the purposes of this tale. It is upon the character of two of them that all the interest—if there be any—entirely depends. Let them be marked then, and remembered, if the reader would derive entertainment from what follows.

CHAPTER VI.

READER ! can you go back twenty years ? You do it every day. You say, " Twenty years ago I was a boy—twenty years ago I played at peg-top and at marbles—twenty years ago I wooed—was loved—I sinned—I suffered !" What is there in twenty years that should keep us from going back over them ? You go quickly, smoothly, easily, on the forward course—why not in retrogression ? But let me

tell you : it makes a very great difference whether Hope or Memory drive the coach.

Let us see what we can do. Twenty years before the period at which the last chapter broke off, Philip Hastings, now the father of a girl of sixteen, was a lad studying by the side of his brother's grave. Twenty years ago, Sir John Hastings was the living lord of these fine lands and broad estates. Twenty years ago, he passed, from the mouth of the vault in which he had laid the clay of the first-born, into the open splendour of the day, and felt sorrow's desolation in the sunshine. Twenty years ago, he had been confronted on the church-yard path by a tall old woman, and been challenged with words high and stern, to do her right in regard to a paltry rood or two of land. Twenty years ago, he had given her a harsh, cold answer, and treated her menaces with impatient scorn.

Do you remember her, reader? Well, if you do, that brings us to the point I

sought to reach in the dull, flat expanse of the far past ; and we can stand and look around us for awhile.

That old woman was not one easily to forget or lightly to yield her resentments. There is something perdurable in them as well as in her gaunt sinewy frame. As she stood there menacing him, she wanted but three years of seventy. She had battled, too, with many a storm : wind and weather, suffering and persecution, sorrow and privation, had beaten upon her rigorously—very rigorously. They had but served to stiffen and wither and harden, however. Her corporeal frame, shattered as it seemed, was destined to outlive many of the young and fair spirit-tabernacles around it—to pass over, by long years, the ordinary allotted space of human life ; and it seemed as if misfortune had with her a preserving power. It is not wonderful, however, that, while it worked thus upon her body, it should likewise have stiffened and withered and hardened her heart.

I am not sure that conscience itself went untouched in this searing process. It is not clear at all that even her claim upon Sir John Hastings was not an unjust one ; but, just or unjust, his repulse sank deep and festered.

Let us trace her from the church-yard after she met him. She took her path away from the park and the hamlet, between two cottages, where the ragged boys at the doors called her "Old Witch," and spoke about a broom-stick.

She heeded them little : deeper offences were rankling at her heart.

She walked on, across a corn-field and a meadow, and then came upon some woodlands, through which a little sandy path wound its way, round stumps of old trees long cut down, amidst young bushes and saplings just springing up, and catching the sunshine here and there through the bright-tinted foliage over-head. Up the hill it went, over the slope on which the copse was scattered, and then burst

forth again on the opposite side of wood and rise, where the ground fell gently the other way, looking down upon the richly-dressed grounds of Colonel Marshal, at the distance of some three miles.

Not more than a hundred yards off, was a poor man's cottage, with an old grey thatch, which wanted some repairing, and was plentifully covered with herbs, sending the threads of their roots into the straw. A little badly-cultivated garden, fenced from the hill-side by a loose stone wall, surrounded the house, and a gate without hinges gave entrance to this enclosed space.

The old woman went in and approached the cottage-door. When near it, she stopped and listened, lifting one of the flapping ears of her cotton cap to aid the dulled sense of hearing. There were no voices within ; but a low sobbing sound issued forth, as if some one were in bitter distress.

"I should not wonder if she were

alone," said the old woman ; " the ruffian father is always out ; the drudging mother goes about this time to the town. They will neither stay at home, I wot, to grieve for him they let too often into that door, nor to comfort her he has left desolate. But it matters little whether they be in or out. It were better to talk to her first, I will give her better than comfort—revenge, if I judge right. They must play their part afterwards."

Thus communing with herself, she laid her hand upon the latch and opened the door. In an attitude of unspeakable grief sat immediately before her a young and exceedingly beautiful girl, of hardly seventeen years of age. The wheel stood still by her side ; the spindle had fallen from her hands ; her head was bowed down as with sorrow against which she could not bear up ; and her eyes were dropping tears like rain.

The moment she heard the door open, she started, and looked up with fear upon

her face, striving to dash the tears from her eyes ; but the old woman bespoke her softly, saying—

“ Good even, my dear ! Is your mother in the place ? ”

“ No,” replied the girl ; “ she has gone to sell the lint, and father is out too. It is very lonely, and I get sad here.”

“ I do not wonder at it, poor child,” said the old woman ; “ you have had a heavy loss, my dear, and may well cry. We can’t help what is past, you know ; but we can do a good deal for what is to come, if we but take care and make up our minds in time.”

Many and strange were the changes of expression which came upon the poor girl’s face as she heard these few simple words. At first, her cheek glowed hot, as with the burning blush of shame ; then she turned pale and trembled, gazing enquiringly in her visitor’s face, as if she would have asked—

“ Am I detected ? ”

And then she cast down her eyes again, still pale as ashes, and the tears rolled forth once more and fell upon her lap.

The old woman sat down beside her, and talked to her tenderly ; but, alas ! very cunningly too. She assumed far greater knowledge than she possessed. She persuaded the poor girl that there was nothing to conceal from her ; and what neither father nor mother knew, was told that day to one comparatively a stranger. Still the old woman spoke tenderly—ay, very tenderly ; excused her fault—made light of her fears—gave her hope—gave her strength. But all the time, she concealed her full purpose. That was to be revealed by degrees. Whatever had been the girl's errors, she was too innocent to be made a party to a scheme of fraud and wrong and vengeance at once. All that the woman communicated was blessed comfort to a bruised and bleeding heart ; and the poor girl leaned her head upon her old

companion's shoulder, and, amidst bitter tears and sobs and sighs, poured out every secret of her soul.

But what is that she says, which makes the old woman start with a look of triumph?

"Letters!" she exclaimed; "two letters! Let me see them, child—let me see them! Perhaps they may be more valuable than you think."

The girl took them from her bosom, where she kept them as all that she possessed of one gone that day into the tomb.

The old woman read them with slow eyes; but eager attention; and then gave them back, saying:

"That one you had better destroy as soon as possible—it tells too much. But this first one keep, as you value your own welfare—as you value your child's fortune, station, and happiness. You can do much with this. Why, here are words that may make your father a proud man. Hark! I

hear footsteps coming. Put them up! We must go to work cautiously, and break the matter to your parents by degrees."

It was the mother of the girl who entered; and she seemed faint and tired. Well had the old woman called her a drudge, for such she was—a poor, patient, household drudge, labouring for a hard, heartless, idle, and cunning husband, and but too tenderly fond of the poor girl whose beauty had been a snare to her.

She seemed somewhat surprised to see the old woman there; for they were of different creeds, and those creeds made wide separation in the days I speak of. Perhaps she was surprised and grieved to see the traces of tears and agitation on her daughter's face; but of that she took no notice; for doubts and fears were at her heart which she dreaded to confirm. The girl was more cheerful, however, than she had been, for the last week—not gay, not even calm; but yet there was a look of some relief.

Often, even after her mother's entrance, the tears would gather thick in her eyes when she thought of the dead; but it was evident that hope had risen up: that the future was not all darkness and terror. This was a comfort to her mother, who spoke and looked cheerfully. She had sold all the thread of her and her daughter's spinning, and she had sold it well. Part she hid in a corner to keep a pittance for bread from her husband's eyes; part she reserved to give up to him for the purchase of drink: but while she made all these little arrangements, she looked rather anxiously at the old woman, from time to time, as if she fain would have asked: "What brought you here?"

The crone was cautious, however, and knew well with whom she had to deal. She talked in solemn and oracular tones, as if she had possessed all the secrets of Fate; but she told nothing; and when she went away, she said, in a low voice but authoritative manner:

"Be kind to your girl—be very kind ; for she will bring good luck and fortune to you all."

The next day she laid wait for the husband, found and forced him to stop and hear her. At first he was impatient, rude, and brutal ; swore, cursed, and called her many and evil names. But soon he listened earnestly enough : looks of intelligence and eager design past between the two, and before they parted they perfectly understood each other.

The man was afterwards, on more than one day, seen going down to the hall. On his first application, he was refused admission to Sir John Hastings ; for his character was known. The next day, however, he brought a letter written, under his dictation, by his daughter, who had been taught at a charity school hard by ; and this time he was admitted. His conversation with the Lord of the Manor was long ; but no one knew its import. He came again and again, and was still admitted.

A change passed over the cottage and its denizens. The fences were put in order, the walls were repaired, the thatch was renewed, another room or two was added ; plenty reigned within ; mother and daughter appeared in somewhat finer apparel ; and money was not wanting.

At the end of some months, the cry of a young child was heard in the house. The neighbours were scandalized, and gossips spoke censoriously even in the father's ears ; but he stopped them fiercely, with proud and mysterious words ; boasted aloud of what they had thought his daughter's shame ; and claimed a higher place for her than was willingly yielded by her companions. Strange rumours got afloat ; but ere a twelvemonth had passed, the father had drunk himself to death. His widow and her daughter and her grandson moved to a better house, and lived at ease on money none knew the source of ; while the cottage, now neat

and in good repair, became the dwelling of the old woman who had been driven with scorn from Sir John's presence.

Was she satisfied—had she sated herself? Not yet.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT three years after the death of Sir John Hastings, a very beautiful lady came to a lonely house, which seemed to have been long untenanted except by servants. The house stood some twelve miles to the north of Sir John's seat, which now had passed to his son ; and it was a fine-looking place, with a massive sort of solemn brick-and-mortar grandeur about it, which impressed the mind with a sense of the wealth and long-standing of its owners.

The plural has slipped from my pen, and perhaps it is right ; for the house looked as if it had had many owners, and all of them had been rich.

Now, there was but one owner,—the lady who descended from that lumbering, heavy coach, with the two great leathern wings on each side of the door. She was dressed in widow's weeds, and had every right to wear them. Though two-and-twenty only, she stood there orphan, heiress, and widow. She had known many changes of condition, but not of fate, and they did not seem to have affected her much. Of high-born and proud parentage, she had been an only child for many years before her parents' death. She had been spoiled, to use a common, but not always appropriate, phrase ; for some people cannot be spoiled, either because the ethereal essence within them is incorruptible, or because there is no ethereal essence to spoil. She had, however, been spoiled very successfully by fate, fortune, and kind friends.

She had never been contradicted in her life : she had never been disappointed—but once. She had enjoyed many things—had travelled, and seen strange countries—which was rare in those days with women. She had married a handsome, foolish man, whom she chose, few knew rightly why. She had lost both her parents not long after ; got tired of her husband, and lost him too, just when the loss could leave nothing behind but a little decent regret, which she cultivated as a slight stimulant to keep her mind from stagnating. And now, without husband, offspring, or parents, she returned to the house of her childhood, which she had not seen for five long years.

Is that all her history ? No, not exactly all. There is one little incident which may as well be referred to here. Her parents had entered into an arrangement for her marriage with Sir Philip Hastings, a very different man from him whom she afterwards chose ; and foolishly they had told her of what had been done, before the

young man's own assent had been given. She did not see much of him—certainly not enough to fall in love with him. She even thought him a strange, moody youth ; yet there was something in his moodiness and eccentricity which excited her fancy. The reader knows that he chose for himself ; and the lady also married immediately afterwards.

Thus had passed for her a part of life's fragrance ; and now she came to her own native dwelling, to let the rest of existence march by as it might. At first, as she slowly descended from the carriage, her large, dark, brilliant eyes were fixed on the ground. She had looked long at the house as she was driving towards it, and it seemed to have cast her into a thoughtful mood. It is hardly possible to enter a house where we have spent many early years, without finding memory suddenly seize upon the heart and possess it totally. What a grave it is ! What a long line of buried ances-

tors may not *the present* always contemplate there!

Nor are many received into the tomb worth so much respect as one dead hour. All else shall live again : lost hours have no resurrection.

Old servants were waiting around to welcome her, new ones attending upon her orders ; but for a moment or two she noticed no one, till at length the old housekeeper, who knew her from a babe, spoke out, saying,—

“ Ah, madam ! I do not wonder to see you a little sad on first coming to the old place again, after all that has happened.”

“ Ay, indeed, Arnold,” replied the lady, “ many sad things have happened since we parted. But how are you, Goody ? You look blooming.”

And walking into the house, she heard the reply in the hall.

From the hall, the old housekeeper led her lady through the mansion, and

mightily did she chatter and gossip by the way. The lady listened nearly in silence ; for Mrs. Arnold was generous in conversation, and spared her companion all expense of words. At length, however, something she said, seemed to rouse her mistress, and she exclaimed, with a somewhat bitter laugh—

“And so the good people declared I was going to be married to Sir Philip Hastings?”

“*Mr.* Hastings he was then, madam,” answered the housekeeper ; “to be sure they did. All the country round talked of it, and the tenants listened at church to hear the banns proclaimed.”

The lady turned very red ; and the old woman went on to say—

“Old Sir John seemed quite sure of it ; but he reckoned without his host, I fancy.”

“He did indeed,” said the lady, with an

uncheerful smile ; and there the subject dropped for the time.

Not long after, however, the lady herself brought the conversation back to nearly the same point, asked after Sir Philip's health and manner of living, and how he was liked in the neighbourhood, adding—

“He seemed a strange being at the time I saw him, which was only once or twice—not likely to make a very pleasant husband, I thought.”

“Oh, dear, yes, madam, he does,” answered Mrs. Arnold, “many a worse, I can assure you. He is very fond of his lady, indeed, and gives up more to her than one would think. He is a little stern, they say, but very just and upright ; and no libertine fellow, like his brother, who was drowned—which, I am sure, was a Providence ; for if he was so bad when he was young, what would he have been when he was old?”

"Better, perhaps," replied her mistress, with a quiet smile; "but was he so very wicked? I never heard any evil of him."

"Oh, dear me, madam! do not you know?" exclaimed the old woman. And then came the whole story of the cotter's daughter on the hill, and how she and her father and old mother Danby—whom people believed to be a witch—had persuaded or threatened Sir John Hastings into making rich people of them.

"Persuaded or threatened Sir John Hastings!" echoed the lady, in a tone of doubt. "I knew him better than either of his sons; and never did I see a man so little likely to yield to persuasion, or bow to menace."

And she fell into a deep fit of musing, which lasted long, while the old house-keeper rambled on from subject to subject, unlistened to, but very well content.

Let us dwell a little on the lady, and on

her character. There is always something to interest, something to instruct, in the character of a woman. It is like many a problem in Euclid, which seems, at first sight, as plain and simple as the broad sunshine ; but when we come to study it, we find intricacies which puzzle us mightily to resolve. It is a fine, curious, delicate, complicated piece of anatomy, a woman's heart. I have dissected many, and I know the fact. Lay that fibre apart—take care, for Heaven's sake! that you do not tear the one next to it ; and be sure you do not dissever the fragments which bind those most opposite parts together! See, here lies a muscle of keen sensibility ; and there—what is that? A cartilage, hard as a nether mill-stone. Look at those light, irritable nerves, quivering at the slightest touch ; and then see those tendons, firm, fixed, and powerful as the resolution of a martyr. Oh, that wonderful piece of organization! who can describe it accurately?

I must not pretend to do so ; but I will give a slight sketch of the being before me.

There she stands, rather above the usual height, but beautifully formed, with every line rounded and flowing gracefully into the others. Calmness and dignity are in the whole air, and in every movement ; yet there is something very firm, very resolute, very considerate, in the fall of that small foot upon the carpet. She cannot intend her foot to stay there for ever ; and yet, when she sets it down, one would be inclined to think she did. Her face is very beautiful—every feature finely cut—the eyes almost dazzling in their dark brightness. How chaste, how lovely, the pure lines of that mouth ! Yet do you see what a habit she has of keeping the teeth close shut—one pure row pressed hard against the other ? The slight sarcastic quiver of the upper lip does not escape you ; and the expanded

nostril, and flash of the eye, contradicted by the fixed, motionless mouth.

Such is her outward appearance, such is she, too, within—though the complexion there is somewhat darker. Much that, had it been cultivated and improved, would have blossomed into womanly virtue; a heart capable of love, strong, fiery, vehement, changeless; not much tenderness—not much pity—no remorse—are there. Pride, of a peculiar character, but strong, ungovernable, unforgiving, and a power of hate and thirst of vengeance, which only pride can give, are there likewise. Super-add a shrewdness—a policy—a cunning—nay, something greater—something approaching the sublime—a divination, where passion is to be gratified, that seldom leads astray from the object.

Yes, such is the interior of that fair temple; and yet, how calm, sweet, and promising it stands!

I have omitted much, perhaps; for the

human heart is like the cauldron of the witches in Macbeth; and one might go on enumerating ingredients till the audience became tired of the song. Shakspeare, with his unvarying tact, has wisely avoided this superfluity. However, what I have said will be enough for the reader's information; and if we come upon any unexplained phenomena, I must endeavour to elucidate them hereafter.

Let us suppose the lady's interview with her housekeeper at an end—all her domestic arrangements made—the house restored to its air of habitation—visits received and paid. Amongst the earliest visitors were Sir Philip and Lady Hastings. He came frankly, and in one of his most happy moods, perfectly ignorant that she had ever been made aware that a marriage was formerly proposed between himself and her; and she received him and his fair wife with every appearance of cordiality. But as soon as these visits, and all the ceremonies, were over, the lady began to drive

much about the country, and to collect every tale and rumour she could meet with of all the neighbouring families. Her closest attention, however, centred upon those affecting the Hastings race ; and she found the whole strange story of the cottage girl confirmed, with many other particulars added. She smiled when she heard this—smiled blandly—it seemed to give her pleasure. She would fain have called upon the girl and her mother too. She longed to do so, and to draw forth with skill, of which she possessed no small share, the key-secret of the whole. But her station, her reputation, prevented her from taking a step which she knew might be bruited abroad, and create strange comments.

She, therefore, resolved upon another move, which she thought would be as well. There would be no objection to her visiting her poorer neighbours, to comfort, to relieve ; and she went to the huts of many.

At length, one early morning, a clear autumn day, the carriage was left below on the high road; and the lady climbed the hill alone towards the cottage where the girl and her parents formerly lived. She found old mother Danby, the reputed witch, who was now its occupant, busily cooking her morning meal; and sitting down, she entered into conversation with her. At first, she could obtain but little information: the old woman was in a sullen mood, and would not speak of anything she did not like. Money was of no avail to unlock her eloquence.

She had never asked or taken charity, the old crone said, and now she did not need it.

The lady pondered for a few minutes' considering the character of her ancient hostess, and trying it by her experience and intuition. Then she boldly asked her for the whole history of young John Hastings and the cottage girl.

"Tell me all," she said ; "for I wish to know it—I have an interest in it."

"Ay?" said the old woman, gazing at her ; "then you are the pretty lady Sir Philip was to have married, but would not have her."

"The same," replied the visitor. And, for an instant, a bright, red spot arose upon her cheek—a pang like a knife passed through her heart.

That was the price she paid for the gratification of her curiosity. But it, probably, *was* gratified, for she stayed nearly an hour and a half in the cottage—so long, indeed, that her servants, who were with the carriage, became alarmed, and one of the footmen walked up the hill. He met his lady coming down.

"Poor thing!" she ejaculated, as if speaking of the old woman she had just left, "her senses wander a little ; but she is poor, and has been much persecuted. I must do what I can for her. Whenever

she comes to the house, see she is admitted."

The old woman did come often, and always had a conference with the lady of the mansion.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE morning, a letter, bearing on its superscription the words, "With speed," was delivered to Sir Philip Hastings, and the bearer had been ordered to wait for an answer. It ran as follows :—

"MY DEAR SIR PHILIP,

"I have not seen you or dear Lady Hastings for many months, nor your sweet Emily either, except at a distance,

when one day she passed my carriage on horseback, a little way off, sweeping along the hill-side like a gleam of light. My life is a sad, solitary one here ; and I wish my friends would take more compassion upon me, and let me see human faces oftener, especially faces that I love.

“ But I know that you are very inexorable in these respects, and, sufficient to yourself, cannot readily conceive how a lone woman can pine for the society of other more living friends than books or Nature. I must therefore attack the only accessible point I know about you, meaning your compassion, which you never refuse to those who really require it. Now I do require it greatly, for at this present time I am engaged in business of a very painful and intricate nature, which I cannot clearly understand, and in which I have no one to advise me but a country attorney, whose integrity, as well as ability, I much doubt. To whom can I apply so well as to you, when I need the counsel and assistance of a friend, equally kind, disinterested, and clear-

headed ? I venture to do so, then, in full confidence ; and ask you to ride over as soon as you can, to give me your advice, or rather, to decide for me, in a matter where a considerable amount of property is at stake, and where decision is required immediately.

“ I trust, when you do come, you will stay all night, as the business is, I fear, of so complicated a nature that it may occupy more than one day of your valuable time in the affairs of

“ Your faithful and obliged servant,

“ CAROLINE HAZLETON.”

“ Is Mrs. Hazleton’s messenger waiting ?” asked Sir Philip Hastings, after having read the letter and mused for a moment.

The servant answered in the affirmative ; and his master rejoined—

“ Tell him I will not write an answer,

as I have some business to attend to ; but I beg he will say to his mistress that I will be with her in three hours."

Lady Hastings uttered a low-toned exclamation of surprise. She did not venture to ask any question—indeed she rarely questioned her husband on any subject; but when anything excited her wonder, or, as was more frequently the case, her curiosity, she was accustomed to seek for satisfaction in a somewhat indirect way, by raising her beautiful eyebrows with a doubtful sort of smile, or, as in the present case, by exclaiming, "Good gracious! Dear me!" or giving utterance to some other little vocative, with a note of interrogation strongly marked after it.

In this instance there was more than one feeling at the bottom of her exclamation. She was surprised, she was curious, and, moreover, in the least degree in the world, jealous. She had her share of weaknesses, as I have said, and one of them was of a kind less uncommon than

may be supposed. Of her husband's conduct she had no fear—not the slightest suspicion ; indeed, to have entertained any, would have been impossible ; but she could not bear to see him liked, admired, esteemed, by any woman—mark me, I say by any *woman*—for no one could feel more triumphant joy than she did when she saw him duly appreciated by men. She was a great monopoliser ; she did not wish one thought of his to be won away from her by another woman ; and a sort of irritable feeling came upon her when she saw him seated by any young and pretty girl, and paying her even the common attentions of society. She was too well bred to display such sensations, except by such slight indication as a certain petulance of manner, which he was not close observer enough of other people's conduct to remark.

Not to dwell too long upon such things, Sir Philip Hastings, though perfectly unconscious of what was going on in her

heart, rarely kept her long in suspense, when he saw any signs of curiosity. He might perhaps think it a point of Roman virtue to spoil his wife, although she had very little of the Portia in her character. On the present occasion he quietly handed over to her the letter of Mrs. Hazleton, and then summoned a servant, and gave orders for various preparations.

"Had not I and Emily better go with you?" asked Lady Hastings, pointing out to him the passage in the letter which spoke of the long absence of all the family.

"Not when I am going on business," replied her husband gravely, and quitted the room.

An hour after, Sir Philip Hastings was on horseback, with a servant carrying a valise behind him, and riding slowly through the park. The day was somewhat far advanced, and the distance was likely to occupy about an hour and a half in travelling; but the gentleman had fallen into

a reverie, and rode very slowly. He and his man took their way down the lane, by the church, and near the parsonage. There Sir Philip pulled in his horse suddenly, and ordered the servant to ride on, and announce that he would be at Mrs. Hazleton's soon after. He then fastened his horse to a large hook, (put up for the express purpose on most country houses of that day in England,) and walked on to the door. It was a-jar; and without ceremony he pushed it open, as he was often accustomed to do, and entered the little study of the rector. The clergyman himself was not there; but two persons were in the room—one a young and rather dashing man of about two-and-twenty years of age, exceedingly handsome both in face and figure; the other a personage past the middle time of life, thin, pale, eager and keen-looking, in whom Sir Philip instantly recognized a well-known, but not very well-reputed,

attorney of a country town, about twenty miles distant. They had one of the large parish-books before them, and were both bending over it with great appearance of earnestness.

The step of Sir Philip Hastings roused them, and, turning round, the attorney bowed low, saying—

“I give you good day, Sir Philip ; I I hope I have the honour of seeing you well.”

“ Quite so,” was the brief reply, followed by an inquiry for the parson who it seemed had gone into another apartment for some papers which were required. In the meantime the younger of the two present occupants of the room had been gazing at Sir Philip Hastings with a rude, familiar stare, which the object of it did not remark ; and in another moment the clergyman himself appeared, carrying a bundle of old letters in his hand.

He was a heavy, somewhat timid, man,

the reverse of his predecessor in all things, but a very good sort of person upon the whole. On seeing the baronet there, however, something seemed strangely to affect him—a sort of confused surprise, which, after various stammering efforts, burst forth, as soon as the usual salutation was over, in the words—

“ Pray Sir Philip, did you come by appointment ?”

Sir Philip Hastings, as the reader already knows, was an unobservant man of what was passing around him in the world. He had his own deep, stern trains of thought, which he pursued with an eager, passionate earnestness amounting almost to monomania. The actions, words, and even looks, of those few in whom he took an interest, he could watch and comment on in his own mind, with intense study. True, he watched without understanding, and commented wrongly ; for he had too little experience of the motives of

others from outward observation, and found too little sympathy with the general motives of the world in his own heart, to judge rightly even those he loved. But the conduct, the looks, the words, of ordinary men, he hardly took the trouble of remarking ; and the good parson's surprise and hesitation passed like breath upon a mirror, seen, perhaps, but retaining no hold upon his mind for a moment. Neither did the abrupt question surprise him ; nor the quick angry look, which it called up on the face of the attorney, attract his notice. He replied quietly,

"No, Mr. Dixwell, I do not remember having made any appointment with you."

The matter was all very well so far, and would have continued well ; but the attorney, a meddling fellow, had nearly spoiled all by calling the attention of Sir Philip Hastings more strongly to the strangeness of the clergyman's question.

"Perhaps," said the man of law, "per-

haps Mr. Dixwell thought, Sir Philip, that you came here to speak to me on this business of the Honourable Mrs. Hazleton. She told me she should consult you, and I can explain the whole matter to you."

But the clergyman instantly declared that he meant nothing of the kind ; and, at the same moment, Sir Philip Hastings said to the attorney,

" I beg you will not give yourself that trouble, sir. Mrs. Hazleton will explain what she thinks proper to me herself. I desire no previous information, as I am now on my way to her. Why my good friend here should suppose I came by appointment, I cannot tell. However, I did not ; and it does not matter. I only came, Mr. Dixwell, to say that I hear the old woman Danby is ill, and dying. She is a Papist ; and the foolish people in the neighbourhood fancy she is a witch. Little help or comfort will she obtain from them, even if they do not injure and insult her. As I

shall be absent all night, and perhaps all to-morrow, I will call at her cottage as I ride over to Mrs. Hazleton's, and inquire into her wants. I will put down on paper and leave there what I wish my people to do for her ; but there is one thing which I must request *you* to do, namely, to take every means, by exhortation and remonstrance, to prevent the ignorant peasantry from troubling this poor creature's death-bed. Her sad errors in matters of faith, should only, at such a moment, make us feel the greater compassion for her."

Mr. Dixwell thought differently ; for, though a good man, he was a fanatic. He did not, indeed, venture to think of disobeying the injunction of the great man of the parish--the man who now held both the Hastings and the Marshal property ; but he would fain have detained Sir Philip, to explain and make clear to him the position--as clear as a demonstration in Euclid to his own mind--that all Roman Catholics

ought to be, at the very least, banished from the country for ever.

But Sir Philip Hastings was not inclined to listen ; and, although the good man began the argument in a solemn tone, his visitor, falling into a fit of thought, walked slowly out of the room, along the passage, through the door, and mounted his horse, without effectually hearing one word, though they were many, which Mr. Dixwell showered upon him as he followed.

On his return to his little study, the parson found the young man and the lawyer looking at the book, but conversing together very eagerly, with excited countenances and quick gestures. The moment he entered, however, they stopped, the young man ending with an oath, for which the clergyman reproved him on the spot.

"That is all very well, Mr. Dixwell," said the attorney, "and my young friend here

will be much the better for some good admonition, and for sitting under your ministry, as I trust he will, some day soon ; but we must go, I fear, directly. However, there is one thing I want to say ; for you had nearly spoiled everything to-day. No person playing at cards—”

“I never touch them,” said the parson, with a holy horror in his face.

“Well, others do,” said the attorney ; “and those who do, never show their hand to their opponent. Now, law is like a game at cards—”

“In which the lawyer is sure to get the odd trick,” observed the young man.

“And we must not let Sir Philip Hastings know one step that we are taking,” continued the lawyer. “If you have conscience, as I am sure you have, and honour, as I know you have, you will not suffer anything that we have asked you, or said to you, to transpire ; for then, of course, Sir Philip would take every means to prevent our obtaining information.”

"I do not think it," said the parson.

"And justice and equity would be frustrated," proceeded the attorney, "which you are bound by your profession to promote. We want nothing but justice, Mr. Dixwell; justice, I say; and no one can tell what card Sir Philip may play."

"I will trump it with the knave," said the young man to himself.

Having again cautioned the clergyman to be secret, not without some obscure menaces of danger to himself if he failed, the two gentlemen left him, and hurried down as fast as they could go to a small ale-house in the village, where they had left their horses. In a few minutes after, a well-known poacher, bruiser, and bully, whose very frequent habitation was the jail or the cage, was seen to issue forth from the door of the ale-house, then to lead a very showy-looking horse from the stable, and then to mount him and take his way over the hill.

The poacher had never possessed a more dignified quadruped than a dog or a donkey in his life ; so that it was evident the horse could not be his. That he was not engaged in the congenial but dangerous occupation of stealing it, was clear from the fact of the owner of the beast gazing quietly at him out of the window while he mounted, and then turning round to the attorney, who sat at a table hard by, and saying,

“ He is off, Shanks.”

“ Well, let him go,” replied the lawyer ; “ but I do not half like it, Master John. Everything in law should be cool and quiet : no violence, no bustle.”

“ But this is not a matter of law,” returned the younger man ; “ it is a matter of safety, you fool. What might come of it, if he were to have a long, canting talk with the old wretch upon her death-bed ? ”

“ Very little,” replied the attorney, in a calm, well-assured tone. “ I know her

well; she is as hard as a flint-stone ; she always was, and time has not softened her. Besides, he has no one with him to take depositions ; and, if what you say is true, she'll not live till morning."

"But I tell you she is getting frightened as she comes near death !" exclaimed the young man. "She has got all sorts of fancies into her head about hell, and purgatory, and the devil knows what ; and she spoke to my mother yesterday about repentance and atonement, and a pack of stuff more, and wanted extreme unction, and to confess to a priest. It would be a fine salve, I fancy, that patches up the wounds in her conscience ; but if this Philip Hastings were to come to her with his grave face and solemn tone, and frighten her still more, he would get anything out of her he pleased."

"I don't think it," answered the lawyer, deliberately ; "hate, Master John, is the longest-lived passion I know. It lasts in

the grave, as I have often seen, in making good men's wills when they were dying—sanctified, good men, I say. Why, I have seen a man who has spent half his fortune in charity and built alms-houses, leave a thoughtless son, or a runaway daughter, or a plain-spoken nephew, to struggle with poverty all his, or her, life, refusing, with his last breath, to forgive such near relations, and comforting himself with a text or a pretence. No, no ; hate is the only possession that goes out of the world with a man ; and this old witch, Danby, hates the whole race of Hastings with a goodly strength that will not decay even as her body dies. Besides, Sir Philip is well nigh as puritanical as his father—a sort of cross-breed, between an English fanatic and an old Roman cynic. She abominates the very sound of his voice ; and nothing could reconcile her to him, but his taking the mass and abjuring the errors of Calvin. Ha, ha, ha ! However, as you have sent the fellow,

it cannot be helped ; only remember *I* had nothing to do nothing to do with it if violence follows. That man is not to be trusted ; and I like to keep on the safe side of the law."

" Ay, doubtless, doubtless," rejoined the other, somewhat thoughtfully ; " it is your shield, and better stand behind it than before it. However, I don't doubt Tom Cutter in the least. Besides, I only told him to interrupt them in their talk, and take care that they had no private gossip ; to stick there till he was gone, and all that."

" Sir Philip is not a man to bear such interruption," said the attorney, gravely. " He is as quiet-looking as the deep sea in a summer's day ; but storms can come, I can tell you, John ; and then woe to those who have trusted the quiet look."

" If he gets into a passion, and mischief comes of it," replied the young

man, with a laugh, "the fault is his, you know, Shanks."

"True," answered the attorney, meditating: "and, perhaps, by a little clever twisting and turning, we might make something of it, if he did, were any other person concerned but this Tom Cutter, and we had a good serviceable witness or two. But the man is such a rogue, that his word is worth nothing; and to thrash him well—though the business of the beadle—would be no discredit to the magistrate. Besides, he is sure to give the provocation, and one word of Sir Philip would be worth a thousand oaths of Tom Cutter, in any court in the kingdom."

"As to thrashing him, few can do that," observed the other; "but only remember, Shanks, that I gave no *orders* for violence."

"I was not present when you gave your orders," replied the attorney, with a grin. "You had better, by a great deal, trust entirely to me in these

things, Master John. If you do, I will bring you safely through, depend upon it ; but if you do not, nobody can tell what may come. Here comes Folwel, the sexton. Now, hold your tongue, and let me manage him, sir. You are not acquainted with these matters."

CHAPTER IX.

DID you ever examine an ant-hill, dear reader? What a wonderful little Cosmos it is!—what an epitome of a great city, and of the human race! See how the little fellows run bustling along upon their several businesses. See how some get out of the way of others—how others jostle and others walk over their fellows' heads; but especially mark that black gentleman pulling hard to drag along a fat beetle's leg and thigh, three times as big as his own body. He

cannot get it on, do what he will : and yet he tugs away, thinking it a very fine haunch indeed. He does not perceive, what is nevertheless the fact, that two of his own race are pulling at the other end, and frustrating all his efforts.

And thus it is with you and me, and every one in the wide world. We work blindly, unknowing the favouring or counteracting causes that are constantly going on around us, to facilitate or impede our endeavours.

The wish to look into futurity is vain, irrational, almost impious ; but what a service would it be to any man, if he could but get a sight into Fate's great workshop, and see only that part in which the events are on the anvil, that affect his own proceedings. Still, even if we did, we might not understand the machinery after all, and only burn or pinch our fingers in trying to put pieces together which Fate did not intend to fit.

In the meantime—that is to say, while

the attorney and his companion were talking together at the ale-house—Sir Philip Hastings rode quietly up the hill to the cottage which I have before described, and therefore shall not describe again, merely noticing that it now presented an appearance of neatness and repair which it had not before possessed. He tied his horse to the palings, walked slowly up the little path, gazing right and left at the cabbages and carrots on either side, and then, without ceremony, went in.

The cottage had two tenants at this time : the invalid old woman, and another, well nigh as old, but less decrepid, who had been engaged to attend upon her in her sickness. How she got the money to pay her, no one knew ; for her middle life, and the first period of old age, had been marked by poverty and distress ; but somehow money seems to have a natural affinity to old age. It grows upon old people, I think, like corns ; and certainly she never wanted money now.

There she was, lying in her bed, a miserable object, indeed, to see. She was like a woman made of fungus—not of that smooth, putty-like, fleshy fungus which grows in dark places; but of the rough, rugged, brown, carunculated sort, which rises upon old stumps of trees and dry-rot gate-posts. Teeth had departed nearly a quarter of a century before; the aquiline features had become more hooked and beaky for their loss; and the eyes had now lost their keen fire, and were dull and filmy.

The attorney was quite right. Hate was the last thing to go out in the ashes, even where the spark of life itself lingered but faintly. At first she could not see who it was entered the cottage; for her sight now reached but a short distance from her own face. But the sound of Sir Philip's voice, as he enquired of the other old woman how she was going on, at once showed her who it was; and hate roused "the dull cold ear of death."

For a moment or two she lay muttering sounds which seemed to have no meaning; but at length she said, distinctly enough :

“ Is that Philip Hastings ?”

“ Yes, my poor woman,” returned the baronet. “ Is there anything I can do for you ?”

“ Come nearer, come nearer,” she said ; “ I can’t see you plainly.”

“ I am close to you, nevertheless,” he answered ; “ I am touching the bed on which you lie.”

“ Let me feel you,” continued she : “ give me your hand.”

He did as she asked him ; and, holding by his hand, she made a great struggle to raise herself in bed ; but she could not do so, and lay exhausted for a minute before she spoke again. At length, however, she raised her voice louder and shriller than before :

“ May a curse rest upon this hand, and upon that head !” she exclaimed. “ May the hand work its own evil, and the head

its own destruction ! May the child of your love poison your peace, and make you a scoff, and a by-word, and a shame ! May the wife of your bosom perish by—”

But Sir Philip Hastings withdrew his hand suddenly ; and an unwonted flush came upon his cheek.

“ For shame ! ” he ejaculated, in a low, stern tone ; “ for shame ! ”

The next moment, however, he recovered himself perfectly ; and, turning to the nurse, he said :

“ Poor wretch ! my presence only seems to excite evil feelings, which should have long passed away, and are not fit counselors for the hour of death. If there be anything which can tend to her bodily comfort that the hall can supply, send up for it. The servants have orders. Would that anything could be done for her spiritual comfort ; for this state is terrible to witness ! ”

“ She often asks for a priest, your worship,” said the nurse ; “ perhaps, if she

could see one, she might think better before she died."

"Alas! I doubt it," replied the visitor; "but at all events we cannot afford her that relief. No such person can be found here."

"I don't know, Sir Philip," said the old woman, with a good deal of hesitation; "they do say that at Carrington there is—there is what they call a seminary."

"You do not mean a Papist college!" exclaimed the baronet, with unfeigned surprise and consternation.

"Oh! dear no, sir," replied the nurse; "only a gentleman—a seminary—a seminary priest, I think they call him: a Papist, certainly; but they say he is a very good gentleman, all but that."

Sir Philip mused for a minute or two, and then turned to the door, saying,

"Methinks it is hard that a dying woman cannot have the consolations of the rites of her own faith—mummery though they be. As a magistrate, my good woman, I

can give no authority in this business. You must do as you think fit. I myself know of no priest in this neighbourhood, or I should be bound to cause his apprehension. I shall take no notice of your words, however; and as to the rest, you must act as you think fit. I did not make the laws, and I may think them cruel. Did I make them, I would not attempt to shackle the conscience of any one. Farewell!"

And, passing through the door, he remounted his horse, and rode away.

It was in the early Autumn time of the year, and the scene was peculiarly lovely. I have given a slight description of it already; but I must pause, and dwell upon it once again, even as Sir Philip Hastings paused and dwelt upon its loveliness at that moment, although he had seen and watched it a thousand times before. He was not very impressible by fine scenery. Like the sages of Laputa, his eyes were more frequently turned in-

wards than outwards ; but there was something in that landscape that struck a chord in his heart, which is sure, when such a prospect is beheld, to vibrate in the breast of every one of his countrymen.

It was peculiarly English—I might say singularly English ; for I have never seen anything of exactly the same character anywhere else but in Old England—except indeed in New England, where (I know not whether it be from the country having assimilated itself to the people, or from the people having chosen the country from the resemblance to their old paternal dwelling-place) many a scene strikes the eye which brings back to the wandering Englishman all the old dear feelings of his native land ; and, for a moment, he may well forget that the broad Atlantic rolls between him and the home of his youth.

But let me return to my picture. Sir Philip Hastings sat upon his horse's back very nearly at the summit of the long

range of hills which bisected the county in which he dwelt. I have described, in mentioning his park, the sandy character of the soil on the opposite slope of the rise ; but here, higher up, and little trodden by pulverizing feet, the sand-stone rock itself occasionally broke out in rugged masses, diversifying the softer characteristics of the scene. Wide and far away, on either hand, the eye could wander along the range, catching first upon some bold mass of hill or craggy piece of ground, assuming almost the character of a cliff, seen in sharp and hard distinctness, with its plume of trees and coronet of yellow gorse ; and then, proceeding onward to wave after wave, the sight rested upon the various projecting points, each softer and softer as they receded, like the memories of early days, till the last lines of the wide sweep left the mind doubtful whether they were forms of earth, or clouds, or merely fancy.

Such was the scene on either hand ; but straight forward it was very different, though still quite English.

Were you ever, reader, borne to the top of a very high wave in a small boat ; and did you ever, looking down the watery mountain, mark how the steep descent into the depth below was chequered by smaller waves, and those waves again by ripples ? Such was the character of the view beneath the feet of the spettator. There was a gradual, easy descent from the highest point of the whole county, down to a river-nurtured valley, not unbroken, but with lesser and lesser waves of earth, varying the aspect of the scene. These waves again were marked out, first by scattered and somewhat stunted trees, then by large oaks and chesnuts, not undiversified by the white gleaming bark of the graceful birch. A massive group of beeches here and there was seen ; a scattered cottage, too, with its pale blueish wreath of smoke curling up over the tree-

tops. Then, on the lower slope of all, came hedge-rows of elms, with bright green rolls of verdant turf between; then the spires of churches, the roofs and white walls of many sorts of man's dwelling places, and gleams of a bright river, with two or three arches of a bridge. Beyond that again, appeared a rich, wide valley—I might almost have called it a plain—all in gay confusion, with fields, and houses, and villages, and trees, and streams, and towers, mixed in exquisite disorder, and tinted with all the variety of colours and shades that belong to Autumn and to sunset.

Down the descent the eye of Sir Philip Hastings could trace several roads and paths, every step of which he knew, like daily habits. There was one, a bridle-way from a town about sixteen miles distant, which, climbing the hills almost at its outset, swept along the side of the whole range, about midway between the summit and the valley. Another, by which he had come,

and along which he intended to proceed, traversed the crest of the hills ere it reached the cottage, and then descended with a wavy line into the valley, crossing the bridle-path I have mentioned. A wider path—indeed it might be called a road, though it was not a turnpike-road—came over the hills from the left; and, with all those easy, graceful turns which Englishmen so much love in their highways, and Frenchmen so greatly abhor, descended likewise into the valley, to the small market-town, glimpses of which might be caught over the tops of the trees.

As the baronet sat there upon horseback, and looked around, more than one living object met his eye. To say nothing of some sheep wandering along the unenclosed part of the hill, now stopping to nibble the short grass—now trotting forward for a sweeter bite; not to notice the oxen in the pastures below—there was a large cart slowly wending its way along an open

part of the road, about half a mile distant; and upon the bridle-path which I have mentioned, the figure of a single horseman was seen, riding quietly and easily along, with a sauntering sort of air, which gave a beholder, at once, the notion that he was what Sterne would have called a picturesque traveller, and was enjoying the prospect as he went.

On the road that came over the hill from the left was another rider of a very different demeanour, going along at a rattling pace, and apparently rather careless of his horse's knees.

The glance which Sir Philip Hastings gave to either of them was but slight and hasty. His eyes were fixed upon the scene before him, feeling rather than understanding its beauties, while he commented in his mind, after his own peculiar fashion. I need not trace the procession of thought through his brain. It ended however with the half uttered words,

"Strange that such a land should have produced so many scoundrels, tyrants, and knaves!"

He then slowly urged his horse forward down the side of the hill, soon reached some tall trees where the enclosures and hedge-rows commenced, and was approaching the point at which the road he was travelling crossed the bridle-path, when he heard some loud, and, as it seemed to him, angry words passing between two persons he could not see.

"I will soon teach you that," cried a loud, coarse tongue, adding an exceedingly blasphemous oath, which I will spare the reader.

"My good friend," replied another and milder voice, "I neither desire to be taught anything just now, nor would you be the teacher I should choose if I did ; though, perchance, in case of need, *I* might give *you* a lesson which would be of some service to you."

Sir Philip rode on ; and the next words

he heard, were spoken by the first voice, to the following effect :—

“Curse me, if I would not try that ; only my man might get off in the meantime, and I have other business in hand than yours. Otherways, I would give you such a licking, in two minutes, that you would be puzzled to find a white spot on your skin for the next month.”

“Two minutes would not detain you long,” replied the calmer voice ; “and as I have never had such a beating, I should like to see, first, whether you could give it, and secondly, what it would be like.”

“Upon my soul, you are cool,” observed the first speaker, with another oath.

“Perfectly,” rejoined the second.

At the same moment, Sir Philip Hastings emerged from amongst the trees at the point where the roads crossed, and where the two speakers were face to face before his eyes.

The one, who was in truth the sauntering traveller whom he had seen wending

along the bridle-path, was a tall, good-looking young man, of three or four-and-twenty years of age. In the other, the baronet had no difficulty in recognising at once, Tom Cutter, the notorious poacher and bruiser, whom he had more than once had the satisfaction of committing to jail. To see him mounted on a very fine, powerful horse was a matter of no slight surprise to Sir Philip ; but, naturally concluding that he had stolen it, and was making off with his prize, for sale, to the neighbouring town, he rode forward, and put himself right in the way, determined to stop him.

“ Ay, ay, here is my man,” cried Tom Cutter, as soon as he saw him ; “ I will settle with him first, and then for you, my friend.”

“ No, no : to an old proverb—first come must be first served,” replied the traveller, pushing his horse forward a few steps.

“ Keep the peace, in the King’s name !”

exclaimed Sir Philip Hastings. "I, as a magistrate, charge you, sir, to assist me in apprehending this man. Thomas Cutter, get off that horse."

The only reply was a coarse and violent expletive, and a blow with a heavy stick, aimed right at Sir Philip's head. The magistrate put up his arm, which received the blow, and was nearly fractured by it ; but, at the same moment, the younger traveller spurred forward his horse upon the ruffian, and with one sweep of his arm struck him to the ground.

Tom Cutter was upon his feet again in a moment. He was accustomed to hard blows, and, like the immortal hero of Butler, could almost tell the quality of the stick he was beaten withal. He was not long in discovering, therefore, that the fist which struck him was of no ordinary weight, and it was directed with skill as well as with vigour ; but he was accustomed to make it his boast that he had

never "taken a licking" from any man ; which vanity caused him at once to risk such another blow, in the hope of having his revenge.

Rushing upon the young stranger, then, stick in hand, he prepared to knock him from his horse ; for the other appeared to have no defensive arms, except a slight hazel twig pulled from a hedge.

"He will jump off the other side of his horse," thought Tom Cutter ; "and then, if he do, I'll contrive to knock the nag over upon him. I know that trick well enough."

But the stranger disappointed him. Instead of opposing the horse between him and his assailant, he sprang, with one bound, out of the saddle, on the side next to the ruffian himself, caught the uplifted stick with one hand, and seized the collar of the bruiser's coat with the other. Tom Cutter began to suspect that he had made a mistake ; but knowing that, at such close

quarters, the stick would avail him little, and that strength of thews and sinews would avail him much, he dropped the cudgel, and grappled with the stranger in return. It was all the work of a moment. Sir Philip Hastings had no time to interfere. There was a momentary struggle, developing the fine proportions, great strength, and skill of the wrestlers, and then Tom Cutter lay on his back upon the ground. The next instant, the victor put his foot upon his chest, and kept the ruffian forcibly down, notwithstanding all his exclamations of—

“Curse me, that isn’t fair! When you give a man a fall, let him get up again!”

“If he is a fair fighter, I do,” replied the other; “but when he plays pirate, I don’t.” Then, turning to Sir Philip Hastings, who had, by this time, dismounted, he said—“What is to be done with this fellow, sir? It seems, he came here for the express purpose of assaulting you; for

he began his impertinence by asking if you had passed, giving a very accurate description of your person, and swearing you should find that every dog would have his day."

"His offence towards myself," returned the baronet, "I will pass over, for it seems to me he has been punished enough in his own way; but I suspect he has stolen this horse. He is a man of notoriously bad character, who can never have obtained such an animal by honest means."

"No, I didn't steal him, I vow and swear," cried the ruffian, in a piteous tone, for bullies are almost always cravens; "he was lent to me by John Ayliffe—some call him by another name; but that don't signify. He lent him to me to come up here and stop your gab with the old woman, Mother Danby; and, mayhap, to give you a good basting into the bargain; but I didn't steal the horse, nohow; and there he is running away over the hill-side, and

I shall never catch him, for this cursed fellow has well nigh broken my back.

"Served you quite right, my friend," replied the stranger, still keeping him tightly down with his foot. "How came you to use a cudgel to a man who had none? Take my advice another time, and know your man before you meddle with him!"

In the meantime Sir Philip Hastings had fallen into a profound reverie, only repeating to himself the words "John Ayliffe!" Now the train of thought which was awakened in his mind, though not quite new, was unpleasant to him; for the time when he first became familiar with that name was immediately subsequent to the opening of his father's will, in which had been found a clause ordering the payment of a considerable sum of money to some very respectable trustees, for the purpose of purchasing an annuity in favour of John Ayliffe, then a minor. There had been something about the clause which the

son-and-heir of Sir John Hastings could not understand, and did not like. However, the will enjoined him generally to make no inquiry whatsoever into the motives of any of the bequests; and, with his usual stern rigidity in what he conceived right, he had not only asked no questions, but had stopped bluntly one of the trustees who was about to enter into some explanations. The money was paid according to directions received; and he had never heard the name of John Ayliffe from that moment till it issued from the lips of the ruffian on the present occasion.

“What the man says may be true,” remarked Sir Philip Hastings, at length; “there is a person of the name he mentions, but I know not how I can have offended him. It may be as well to let him rise and catch his horse, if he can. But remember, Master Cutter, my eye is upon you; two competent witnesses have seen you in possession

of that horse; and if you attempt to sell him, you will hang for it."

"I know better than to do that," said the bruiser, rising stiffly from the ground as the stranger withdrew his foot; "but I can tell you, Sir Philip, *others* have their eyes upon *you*; so you had better look to yourself. You hold your head mighty top-high just now; but it may chance to come down."

Sir Philip Hastings did not condescend to reply, even by a look; but, turning to the stranger, as if the man's words had never reached his ear, he said,

"I think we had better ride on, sir; you seem to be going my way; night is falling fast, and in this part of the country two is sometimes a safer number to travel than one."

The other bowed his head gravely; and, remounting their horses, they proceeded on the way before them, while Tom Cutter, after giving up some five minutes to the

condemnation of the eyes,*limbs, blood, and soul of himself and several other persons, proceeded as fast as he could to catch the horse which he had been riding ; but the task proved a difficult one.

CHAPTER X.

THE two horsemen rode on their way. Neither spoke for several minutes ; Sir Philip pondering sternly on all that had passed, and his younger companion gazing upon the scene around, flooded with the delicious rays of sunset, as if nothing had passed.

Sir Philip, as I have shewn the reader, had a habit of brooding over anything which excited much interest in his breast ; nay more, of extracting from it, by a

curious sort of alchemy, essences very different from its apparent nature; sometimes bright, fine, and beneficent, and at others dark and maleficent. The whole of the transaction just past disturbed him much: it puzzled him; it set his imagination running upon a thousand tracks, and most of them wrong ones; and thought was not willing to be called from her vagaries to deal with any other subject than that which pre-occupied her.

The young stranger, on the other hand, seemed one of those characters who take all things much more lightly. In the moment of action he had shown skill, resolution, and energy enough; but as he sat there upon his horse's back, looking round at every point of interest to an admirer of Nature, with an easy, calm, and unconcerned air, no one who saw him could have conceived that he had been engaged the moment before in so fierce though short a struggle. There was none of the heat of the combatant, or the triumph of the

victor in his air or countenance ; and his placid and equable expression of face contrasted strongly with the cloud which sat upon the brow of his companion.

“ I beg your pardon, sir, for my gloomy silence,” said Sir Philip Hastings, at length conscious that his demeanour was not very courteous ; “ but this affair troubles me. Besides certain relations which it bears to matter of private concernment, I am not satisfied as to how I should deal with the ruffian whom we have suffered to depart so easily. His assault upon myself I do not choose to treat harshly ; but the man is a terror to the country round, committing many an act to which the law awards a very insufficient punishment, but with sufficient cunning to keep within that line, the passage beyond which would enable society to purge itself of such a stain upon it. How to deal with him I say embarrasses me greatly. I have committed him two or three times to prison already ; and I am inclined to regret that I did not

on this occasion—when he was in the very act of breaking the law—send my sword through him. I should have been well justified in doing so.”

“Nay, sir, methinks that would have been too much,” returned his companion; “he has had a fall, which, if I judge rightly, will be a sufficient punishment for his assault upon you. According to the very *lex talionis*, he has had what he deserves. If he has nearly broken your arm, I think I have nearly broken his back.”

“It is not his punishment for any offence to myself, sir, I seek,” observed the baronet; “it is a duty to society to free it from the load of such a man, whenever he himself affords the opportunity of doing so. Herein the law would have justified me; but even had it not been so, I can conceive many cases where it may be necessary, for the benefit of our country and society, to go beyond what the law will justify, and to make the law for the necessity.”

"Brutus and a few of his friends did so," replied the young stranger, with a smile; "and we admire them very much for so doing; but I am afraid we should hang them, nevertheless, if they were in a position to try the thing over again. The illustration of the gibbet and the statue, might have more applications than one; for I sincerely believe, if we could revive historical characters, we should, in almost all cases, erect a gallows for those to whom we now raise a monument."

Sir Philip Hastings turned and looked at him attentively, and saw that his face was gay and smiling.

"You take all these thing very lightly, sir," he said.

"With a sober lightness," replied the stranger.

"Nay, with something more," rejoined his companion. "In your short struggle with that ruffian, you sprang upon him and overthrew him like a lion, with a fierce

activity which I can hardly imagine really calmed down so soon."

"O yes it is, my dear sir," replied the stranger ; "I am somewhat of a stoic in all things. It is not necessary that rapidity of thought and action, a moment of emergency, should go one line beyond the occasion, or sink one line deeper than the mere reason. The man who suffers his heart to be fluttered, or his passions to be roused, by any just action he is called upon to do, is not a philosopher. Understand me, however ; I do not pretend to be quite perfect in my philosophy ; but at all events, I trust I have schooled myself well enough not to suffer a wrestling-match with a contemptible animal like that, to make my pulse beat a stroke quicker after the momentary effort is over."

Sir Philip Hastings was charmed with the reply ; for, although it was a view of philosophy which he could not and did not follow, however much he might agree to it, yet the course of reasoning and the

sources of argument were so much akin to those he usually sought, that he fancied he had at length found a man quite after his own heart. He chose to express no farther opinion upon the subject, however, till he had seen more of his young companion ; but that more he determined to see. In the meantime, he easily changed the conversation, saying,

“ You seemed to be a very skilful and practised wrestler, sir.”

“ I was brought up in Cornwall,” replied the other, “ though not a Cornish man, and having no affinity with the people. I am proud to believe I am an Anglo-Saxon ; for I look upon that race as the greatest which the world has yet produced.”

“ What ! superior to the Roman ?” asked Sir Philip.

“ Ay, even so,” answered the stranger ; “ with as much energy, as much resolution, less mobility, more perseverance, added to many a quality which the Romans did not

possess. The Romans have left us many a fine lesson which we are capable of practising as well as they, while we can supply much of which they had no notion."

"I should like to discuss the subject with you more at large," said Sir Philip Hastings, in reply; "but I know not whether we have sufficient time to render it worth while to begin."

"I hardly know either," answered the young stranger, "for, in the first place, I am unacquainted with the country, and, in the next place, I know not how far you are going. My own course tends towards a small town called Hartwell, or, as I suspect it ought to be, Hartswell, probably from some fountain at which Hart and Hind used to come and drink."

"I am going a little beyond it," replied Sir Philip Hastings; "so that our journey will lie for the next ten miles together."

With this good space of time before him, the baronet endeavoured to bring his young companion back to the subject which

had been started—a very favourite one with him at all times.

But the stranger seemed to have his hobbies as well as Sir Philip ; and, having dashed into etymology in regard to Hartwell, he pursued it with an avidity which excluded all other topics.

“ I believe,” he said, not in the least noticing Sir Philip’s dissertations upon the Roman virtues, “ that there is not a proper name in England, except a few intruded upon us by the Normans, which might not easily be traced to accidental circumstances in the history of the family or the place. Thus, in the case of Aylesbury, or Eagles-town, from which it is derived, depend upon it the place has been noted as a resort for eagles in old times, coming thither probably for the ducks peculiar to that place. Bristol—in Anglo-Saxon meaning the place of a bridge—is very easily traceable ; and Cosford, or Costaford, meaning in Anglo-Saxon the Tempter’s Ford, evidently derives its name from monk or maiden having met

the enemy of mankind or womankind at that place, and having had cause to rue the encounter. All the 'hams,' all the 'tons,' and all the 'sons,' lead us at once to the origin of the name ; to say nothing of all the points of the compass, all the colours of the rainbow, and every trade that the ingenuity of man has contrived to invent."

In vain Sir Philip Hastings, for the next half hour, endeavoured to bring him back to what he considered more important questions. The young man had evidently had enough of the Romans for the time being, and indulged himself in a thousand fanciful speculations upon every other subject but that, till Sir Philip, who at one time had rated his intellect very highly, began to think him little better than a fool. Suddenly, however, as if from a sense of courtesy rather than inclination, the stranger let his companion have his way in the choice of subject, and in his replies showed such depth of thought, such a thorough ac-

quaintance with history, and such precise and definite views, that once more the baronet changed his opinion, and said to himself,

“This a fine and noble intellect indeed, nearly spoilt by the infection of a corrupt and frivolous world, but which might be reclaimed if fortune should throw him in the way of those whose principles have been fixed and tried.”

He pondered upon the matter for some short time. It was now completely dark, and the town to which the stranger was going, distant not a quarter of a mile. The little stars were looking out in the heavens, peeping at man's actions like bright-eyed spies at night ; but the moon had not risen, and the only light upon the path was reflected from the flashing, dancing stream that ran along beside the road, seeming to gather up all the stray rays from the air, and give them back with interest.

“You are coming very near Hartwell,” said Sir Philip, at length ; “but it is

somewhat difficult to find it from this road; and being but little out of my way, I will accompany you thither, and follow the high road onward."

The stranger was about to express his thanks, but the baronet stopped him, saying,

"Not in the least, my young friend. I am pleased with your conversation, and should be glad to cultivate your acquaintance if opportunity should serve. I am called Sir Philip Hastings, and shall be glad to see you at any time if you are passing near my house."

"I shall certainly wait upon you, Sir Philip, if I stay any time in this county," replied the other; "that, however, is uncertain, for I come here merely on a matter of business, which may be settled in a few hours—indeed it ought to be so, for it seems to me very simple. However, it may detain me much longer, and then I shall not fail to take advantage of your kind permission."

He spoke gravely ; and little more was said till they entered the small town of Hartwell, about half through which, a large gibbet-like bar was seen projecting from the front of a house, suspending a board, upon which was painted a star. The light shining from the windows of an opposite house fell upon this symbol ; and the stranger, drawing in his rein, said—

“ Here is my inn, and I will now wish you good night, with many thanks, Sir Philip.”

“ Methinks it is I should thank you,” replied the baronet, “ both for a pleasant journey, and for the punishment you inflicted upon that ruffian, Cutter.”

“ As for the first,” said the stranger, “ that has been more than repaid, if, indeed, it deserved thanks at all ; and as for the other, that was a pleasure in itself. There is a great satisfaction to me in breaking down the self-confidence of one of these burly bruisers.”

As he spoke, he dismounted, wishing Sir Philip good night, who then rode on his way. His meditations as he went were altogether upon the subject of the young stranger ; for, as I have shown, Sir Philip rarely suffered two ideas to get any strong grasp of his mind at the same time. He revolved, and weighed, and dissected everything the young man had said ; and the conclusion that he came to was even more favourable than at first. He seemed a man after his own heart, with just sufficient difference of opinion and diversity of character to make the baronet feel a hankering for some opportunity of moulding and modelling him to his own standard of perfection. Who he could be, he could not divine. That he was a gentleman in manners and character, there could be no doubt. That he was not rich, Sir Philip argued from the fact of his not having chosen the best inn in the little town ; and he might also conclude that he was of no very distinguished

family, as he had not thought fit to mention his own name in return for the baronet's frank invitation.

Busy with these thoughts, Sir Philip rode on but slowly, and took nearly half an hour to reach the gates of Mrs. Hazleton's park, though they stood at only two miles' distance from the town. He arrived before them at length, however, and rang the bell. The lodge-keeper opened them but slowly, and, putting his horse to a quicker pace, Sir Philip trotted up the avenue towards the house. He had not reached it, however, when he heard the sound of horses' feet behind him; and, as he was dismounting at the door, his companion of the way rode quickly up, and sprang to the ground, saying, with a laugh—

“I find, Sir Philip, that we are both to enjoy the same quarters to-night. On my arrival at Hartwell, I did not expect to visit this house till to-morrow morning. Mrs. Hazleton, however, has very kindly had my baggage brought up from the inn,

and therefore I have no choice but to intrude upon her to-night."

As he spoke, the doors of the house were thrown open, servants came forth to take the horses, and the two gentlemen were ushered at once into Mrs. Hazleton's drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. HAZLETON was looking as beautiful as she had been at twenty—perhaps more so ; for the few last years before the process of decay commences, sometimes add rather than detract from woman's loveliness. She was dressed with great skill and taste, too ; nay, even peculiar care. Her hair, which had not yet even one silver thread in its wavy mass, was so arranged as to hide, in some degree, that height and width of forehead which gave

almost too intellectual an expression to her countenance, and, upon some occasions, rendered the expression (for the features were all feminine) more that of a man than of a woman. Her dress was very simple in appearance, though costly in material ; but it had been chosen by the nicest perception of colours which best harmonised with her complexion, and seemed rather to indicate beauties than to display them.

Thus attired, with grace and dignity in every motion, she advanced to meet Sir Philip Hastings, frankly holding out her hand to him, and beaming on him one of her most lustrous smiles. It was all thrown away upon *him*, indeed ; but that did not matter : it had its effect in another quarter. She then turned to the younger gentleman with a greater degree of reserve in manner ; but yet, as she spoke to him and welcomed him to her house, the colour deepened in her cheek with a blush that would not have been lost to the eyes of Sir Philip, if he had been at all in the custom of making

use of them. They had evidently met before, but not often; and her words, "Good evening, Mr. Marlow, I am glad to see you at my house," at length were said in the tone of one who was really glad, but yet did not wish to show it too plainly. "You have come with my friend, Sir Philip Hastings," she added. "I did not know you were acquainted."

"Nor were we, my dear madam, till this evening," replied the Baronet, speaking for himself and his companion of the road, "when we met, by accident, on the hill side during our way hither. We had a somewhat unpleasant encounter with a notorious personage of the name of Tom Cutter, which brought us first into acquaintance, though, till you uttered it, my young friend's name was unknown to me."

"Tom Cutter! Is that the man who poaches all my game?" asked the lady, in a musing tone.

But she was not musing of Tom Cutter,

or the lost game, or of the sins and iniquities of poaching, or of the late encounter. The exclamation and inquiry, taken together, were only one of those little half-unconscious stratagems of human nature by which we often seek to amuse the other parties in conversation, and sometimes amuse our own outward self too, while the hidden spirit within is busily occupied by some question with which we do not desire our interlocutors to have anything to do. She was asking herself, in fact, what Sir Philip Hastings and Mr. Marlow could have talked about on the road to her house—whether they had spoken of her—whether they had discussed her affairs; and how she could best get some information on the subject without seeming to seek it.

She soon had an opportunity of considering the matter more at leisure; for Sir Philip Hastings, with some remarks as to dusty dresses not being fit for ladies' drawing-rooms, retired for a time to the cham-

ber prepared for him. The fair lady of the house detained Mr. Marlow, indeed, for a few minutes, talking with him in a pleasant and gentle tone, and making her bright eyes do their best in the way of captivation. She expressed regret that she had not seen him more frequently, and added a hope, in very graceful terms, that even the painful questions which those troublesome men of law had started between them, might be a means of ripening their acquaintance into friendship.

The gentleman replied with all gallantry, but with due discretion, and then retired to his room to change his dress. He certainly was a very good looking young man: finely formed, and with a pleasing, though not regularly handsome, countenance; and, perhaps, he left Mrs. Hazleton other matters to meditate on than the topics of his conversation with Sir Philip Hastings. Certain it is, that, when the baronet returned, very shortly after, he found his

beautiful hostess in a profound reverie, from which his sudden entrance made her start with a bewildered look not common to her.

"I am very glad to talk to you for a few moments alone, my dear friend," said Mrs. Hazleton, after a moment's pause. "This Mr. Marlow is the gentleman who claims the very property on which we now stand."

And she proceeded to give her hearer, partly by spontaneous explanations, partly by answers to his questions, her own view of the case between herself and Mr. Marlow, labouring hard and skilfully to prepossess the mind of Sir Philip Hastings with a conviction of her rights as opposed to those of her other guest.

"Do you mean to say, my dear madam," asked Sir Philip, "that he claims the whole of this large property? That would be a very heavy blow indeed."

"Oh, dear no," replied the lady. "The

great bulk of the property is mine beyond all doubt ; but the land on which this house stands, and rather more than a thousand acres round it, was bought by my poor father before I was born, I believe, as affording the most eligible site for a mansion. He never liked the old house near your place, and built this for himself. Mr. Marlow's lawyers now declare that his grand uncle, who sold the land to my father, had no power to sell ; that the property was strictly entailed."

"That will be easily ascertained," said Sir Philip Hastings ; "and I am afraid, my dear madam, if it should prove to be the case, you will have no remedy but to give up the property."

"But is not that very hard ?" asked Mrs. Hazleton. "They, the Marlows, certainly had the money."

"That will make no difference," replied Sir Philip, musing. "This young man's grand-uncle may have wronged your father, but *he* is not responsible for the-

act ; and I am very much afraid, moreover, that his claim may not be limited to the property itself. Back rents, I suspect, might be claimed."

"Ay, that is what my lawyer, Mr. Shanks, says," remarked Mrs. Hazleton, with a bewildered look. "He tells me that if Mr. Marlow is successful in the suit, I shall have to pay the whole of the rents of the land. But Shanks added, that he was quite certain of beating him if we could retain for our counsel Sergeant Feetham and Mr. Doubledo."

"Shanks is a rogue," said Sir Philip Hastings, in a calm, equable tone ; "and the two lawyers you have named, bear the reputation of being learned and unscrupulous men. The first point, my dear madam, is to ascertain whether this gentleman's claim is just, and then deal with him equitably, which, in the sense I affix to the term, may be somewhat different from legally."

"I really do not know what to do," cried Mrs. Hazleton, with a slight laugh, as if at her own perplexity. "I was never in such a situation in my life." Then she added very rapidly, and in a jocular tone, as if she was afraid of pausing upon, or giving force to, any one word, "If my poor father had been alive, he would have settled it all, after his way, soon enough. He was a great match-maker you know, Sir Philip, and he would have proposed, in spite of all obstacles, to settle the affair by matrimony instead of by law."

And she laughed again as if the very idea was ridiculous.

Unlearned Sir Philip thought so too, and most improperly replied :

"The difference of age would, of course, put that out of the question."

Nor when he had committed the indiscretion did he perceive the red spot which came upon Mrs. Hazleton's fair brow, and indicated sufficiently the effect his words

had produced. An ominous, silent pause ensued for a minute ; and then the baronet resumed the discourse in his usual calm, argumentative tone.

"I do not think," he said, "from Mr. Marlow's demeanour or conversation, that he is likely to be very exacting in the matter. His claim, however, must be looked to in the first place before we admit anything on your part. If the property was really entailed, he has undoubtedly a right to it, both in honesty and in law ; but, methinks, there he might limit his claim, if his sense of real equity be strong. The entail, however, must first be made perfectly clear."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Hazleton, hastily, for she heard a step on the oaken stairs, "I will leave it entirely to you, Sir Philip. I am sure you will take good care of my interest."

Sir Philip did not altogether like the word "interest ;" and, bowing his head

somewhat stiffly, he added, "And of your *honour*, my dear madam."

Mrs. Hazleton liked *his* word as little as he did *hers*, and she coloured highly. She made no reply indeed ; but that word was never forgotten.

The next moment Mr. Marlow entered the room with a quiet, easy air, evidently unconscious of having been the subject of conversation. During the evening, he paid every sort of polite attention to his fair hostess, and undoubtedly showed signs and symptoms of thinking her a very beautiful and charming woman. Whatever was her game, take my word for it, reader, she played it skilfully ; and the very fact of her retiring early, at the precise moment when she had made the most favourable impression, leaving Sir Philip Hastings to entertain Mr. Marlow at supper, was not without its calculation.

As soon as the lady was gone, Sir Philip turned to the topic of Mrs. Hazleton's

business with his young companion, and managed the matter more skilfully than might have been expected. He simply told him that Mrs. Hazleton had mentioned a claim made upon her estate by his lawyers, and had thought it better to leave the investigation of the matter to her friend than to professional persons.

A frank good-humoured smile came upon Mr. Marlow's face at once.

"I am not a rich man, Sir Philip," he said, "and make no professions of generosity. But at the same time, as my grand-uncle undoubtedly had this money from Mrs. Hazleton's father, I should, most likely, never have troubled her on the subject, had not this very estate been the original seat of our family, on which we can trace our ancestors back through many centuries. The property was, undoubtedly, entailed. My father and my uncle were still living when it was sold, and performed no disentailing act whatever. This is

perfectly susceptible of proof; and, though my claim may put Mrs. Hazleton to some inconvenience, I am anxious to avoid putting her to any pain. Now, I have come down with a proposal, which I confidently trust you will think reasonable. Indeed, I expected to find her lawyer here, rather than an independent friend; and I was assured my proposal would be accepted immediately, by persons who judged of my rights more soundly, perhaps, than I could."

"May I hear what the proposal is?" asked Sir Philip.

"Assuredly," replied Mr. Marlow. "It is this : that, in the first place, Mrs. Hazleton should appoint some gentleman of honour, either at the bar or not, as she may think fit, to investigate my claim, with myself, or some other gentleman on my part, with right to call in a third, as umpire between them. I then propose, that, if my claim should be distinctly proved, Mrs

Hazleton should surrender to me the lands in question, I repaying her the sum which my grand-uncle received, and—”

“Stay,” said Sir Philip Hastings. “Are you aware that the law would not oblige you to do that?”

“Perfectly,” replied Mr. Marlow; “and, indeed, I am not very sure that equity would require it either, for I do not know that my father ever received any benefit from the money paid to his uncle. He may have received a part, however, without my knowing it; for I would rather err on the right side than on the wrong. I then propose that the rents of the estate, as shown by the leases, and fair interest upon the value of the ground surrounding this house, should be computed during the time that it has been out of our possession; while, on the other hand, the legal interest of the money paid for the property should be calculated for the same period, the smaller sum deducted from the larger, and the balance paid by me to Mrs. Hazleton,

or by Mrs. Hazleton to me, so as to replace everything in the same state as if this unfortunate sale had never taken place."

Sir Philip Hastings mused without reply for more than a minute ; that is a long time to muse, and many may be the thoughts and feelings which pass through the breast of a man during that space. They *were* many in the present instance, and it would not be very easy to separate or define them. Sir Philip thought of all the law would have granted to the young claimant under the circumstances of the case ; the whole property, all the back rents, every improvement that had been made, the splendid mansion in which they were then standing, without the payment on Marlow's part of a penny. He compared these legal rights with what he now proposed, and he saw that he had indeed gone a great way on the generous side of equity. There was something very fine and noble in this conduct, something that

harmonised well with his own heart and feelings. There was no exaggeration, no romance, about it : Marlow spoke in the tone of a man of business, doing a right thing well considered ; and the baronet was satisfied in every respect but one.

Mrs. Hazleton's words had suggested an idea that other feelings might be acting between her and his young companion, notwithstanding the difference of age which he had so bluntly pointed out ; and he resolved to inquire further.

In the mean time, however, Mr. Marlow somewhat misinterpreted his silence ; and he added, after waiting longer than was pleasant—

“ Of course you understand, Sir Philip, that if two or three honest men decide that my case is unfounded—although I know that cannot be—I agree to drop it at once, and renounce it for ever. My solicitors and counsel in London judged the offer a fair one at least.”

"And so do I," said Sir Philip Hastings, emphatically ; "however, I must speak with Mrs. Hazleton upon the subject, and express my opinion to her. Pray, have you the papers regarding your claim with you ?"

"I have attested copies," replied Mr. Marlow, "and I can bring them to you in a moment. They are so unusually clear, and seem to put the matter so completely beyond all doubt, that I brought them down to satisfy Mrs. Hazleton and her solicitor, without further trouble, that my demand had at least some foundation in justice."

The papers were immediately brought, and, sitting down, Sir Philip Hastings went deliberately through them with his young friend, carefully weighing every word. They left not even a doubt on his mind ; they seemed not to leave a chance even for the chicanery of the law ; they were clear, precise, and definite. And the

generosity of the young man's offer stood out even more conspicuously than before.

"For my own part I am completely satisfied," said Sir Philip Hastings, when he had done the examination; "and I have no doubt that Mrs. Hazleton will be so likewise: she is an excellent and amiable person, as well as a very beautiful woman. Have you known her long? Have you seen her often?"

"Only once, and that about a year ago," replied Mr. Marlow. "She is indeed very beautiful, as you say—for a woman of her period of life, remarkably so. She puts me very much in mind of my mother, whom, in the confidence of youthful affection, I used to call 'my everlasting.' I recollect doing so only three days before the hand of death wrote upon her brow the vanity of all such earthly thoughts!"

Sir Philip Hastings was satisfied. There was nothing like passion there. Unobser-

vant as he was in most things, he was more clear-sighted in regard to love than to any other affection of the human mind. He had himself loved deeply and intensely, and he had not forgotten it.

It was necessary, before anything could be concluded, to wait for Mrs. Hazleton's rising on the following morning; and, bidding Mr. Marlow good night, with a warm grasp of the hand, Sir Philip Hastings retired to his room, and passed nearly an hour in thought, pondering the character of his new acquaintance, and recalling every trait he had remarked and every word he had heard. It was a very satisfactory contemplation. He never remembered to have met with one who seemed so entirely a being after his own heart. There might be little flaws, little weaknesses, perhaps; but the confirming power of time and experience would, he thought, strengthen all that was good, and counsel and example remedy all that was weak or

"At all events," thought the baronet, "his conduct on this occasion shows a noble and equitable spirit. We shall see how Mrs. Hazleton meets it to-morrow."

When that morrow came, he had to see the reverse of the picture; but it must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. HAZLETON was up in the morning early. She was at all times an early riser, for she well knew what a special conservator of beauty is the morning dew ; but on this occasion certain feelings of impatience made her a little earlier than usual. Besides, she knew that Sir Philip Hastings was always a matutinal man, and would certainly be in the library before she was down. Nor was she disappointed. There she found the Baronet, reaching up his

hand to take down Livy, after having just replaced Tacitus.

"It is a most extraordinary thing, my dear madam," said Sir Philip, after the salutation of the morning, "and puzzles me more than I can explain—"

Mistress Hazleton fancied that her friend had discovered some very knotty point in her case with Mr. Marlow, and she rejoiced; for her object was not to enucleate, but to entangle. Sir Philip, however, went on to put her out of all patience, by exclaiming, "How the Romans, so sublimely virtuous at one period of their history, could fall into so debased and corrupt a state as we find described even by Sallust, and depicted in more frightful colours still by the later historians of the Empire, is, I say, inexplicable!"

Mrs. Hazleton, as I have observed, was out of all patience; and ladies in that state will sometimes have recourse to homely illustrations.

"Their virtue got addled, I suppose,"

she replied, "by too long keeping : virtue is an egg that won't bear sitting on. But now do tell me, Sir Philip : had you any conversation with Mr. Marlow last night upon this troublesome affair of mine ?"

"I had, my dear madam," answered Sir Philip, with a very faint smile, for Sir Philip could not well bear any jesting on the Romans. "I not only conversed with Mr. Marlow on the subject, but I examined carefully the papers he brought down with him, and perceived at once that you have not the shadow of a title to the property in question."

Mrs. Hazleton's brow grew dark, and she observed in a rather sullen tone,

"You decided against me very rapidly, Sir Philip. I hope you did not let Mr Marlow see your strong prepossession—opinion I mean to say—in his favour."

"Entirely," replied Sir Philip Hastings.

Mrs. Hazleton was silent, and gazed down on the carpet as if she were counting the threads of which it was composed,

and found the calculation by no means satisfactory.

Sir Philip let her gaze on for some time, for he was not very easily moved to compassion in cases where he saw dishonesty of purpose as well as suffering. At length, however, he said,

"My judgment in this matter is not binding upon you in the least ; I tell you simply, my dear madam, what is my conviction, and the law will tell you the same."

"We shall see," muttered Mrs. Hazleton between her teeth. But then putting on a softer air, she asked, "Tell me, Sir Philip : would you, if you were in my situation, tamely give up a property which was honestly bought and paid for, without making one struggle to retain it?"

"The moment I was convinced I had no legal right to it," replied Sir Philip. "However, the law is still open to you, if you think it better to resist ; but before you take your determination, you had

better hear what Mr. Marlow proposes ; and you will pardon me for expressing to you what I did not express to him—an opinion that his proposal is founded upon the noblest view of equity.”

“ Indeed ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Hazleton, with her eyes brightening. “ Pray let me hear this proposal.”

Sir Philip explained it to her most distinctly, expecting that she would be both surprised and pleased, and never doubting that she would accept it instantly. Whether she was surprised or not, did not appear, but pleased she certainly was not to any great extent, for she did not wish the matter to be so soon concluded. She began to make objections immediately.

“ The enormous expense of building this house,” she said, “ has not been taken into consideration, and it will be very necessary to have the original papers examined before anything is decided. There are two sides to every question, my dear Sir Philip, and we cannot tell that other

papers may not be found disentailing this estate before the sale took place."

"That is impossible," answered Sir Philip Hastings, "if the papers exhibited to me are genuine; for this gentleman, upon whom, as his father's eldest son, the estate devolved by the entail, was not born when the sale took place. By his act only could it be disentailed; and, as he was not born, he could perform no such act."

Sir Philip pressed her hand in his cold way; and it galled her sorely.

"Perhaps they are *not* genuine," she said at length.

"They are all attested," replied Sir Philip, "and Mr. Marlow himself proposes that the originals should be examined as to the basis of the whole transaction."

"That is absolutely necessary," said Mrs. Hazleton, well satisfied to put off decision even for a time; but Sir Philip would not leave her even that advantage.

"I think," he said, "you must at once

decide whether you accept his proposal, on condition that the examination of the papers proves the justice of his claim to the satisfaction of those you may appoint to examine it. If there are any doubts and difficulties to be raised afterwards, he might as well proceed by law at once."

"Then let him go to law," exclaimed Mrs. Hazleton, with a flashing eye. "If he do, I will defend every step to the utmost of my power."

"Incur enormous expense, give yourself infinite pain and mortification, and ruin a fine estate, by a spirit of unnecessary and unjust resistance," added Sir Phillip, in a calm and somewhat contemptuous voice.

"Really, Sir Philip, you press me too hard," exclaimed Mrs. Hazleton, in a tone of angry mortification; and, sitting down at the table, she actually wept.

"I only press you for your own good," answered the baronet, not at all moved. "You are, perhaps, not aware," continued he, "that, if this gentleman's claim is just,

and you resist it, the whole costs will fall upon you. All that could be expected of him was to submit his claim to arbitration ; but he now does more—he proposes, if arbitrators pronounce it just, to make sacrifices of his legal rights to the amount of many thousand pounds. He is not bound to refund one penny paid for this estate ; he is entitled to back rents for a considerable number of years ; and yet he offers to repay the money, and, far from demanding the back rents, to make compensation for any loss of interest that may have been sustained by this investment. There are few men in England, let me tell you, who would have made such a proposal ; and if you refuse it, you will never have such another.”

“ Don’t you think, Sir Philip,” asked Mrs. Hazleton, sharply, “ that he never would have made such a proposal if he had not known there was something wrong about his title ? ”

Now, there was something in this ques-

tion which doubly provoked Sir Philip Hastings. He never could endure a habit which some ladies have of recurring continually to points previously disposed of, and covering the reiteration by merely putting objections in a new form. The question as to the validity of Mr. Marlow's title, he looked upon as entirely disposed of by the proposal of investigation and arbitration. But there was something more than this: the very question which the lady put, showed an incapacity for conceiving any generous motives which thoroughly disgusted him; and, turning with a quiet step to the window, he looked out upon the lawn, which spread far away between two ranges of tall, fine wood, glowing in the yellow sunshine of a dewy autumnal morning. It was the most favourable thing he could have done for Mrs. Hazleton. The firmest, and the strongest, and the sternest minds are more frequently affected unconsciously by external things than any one is aware of. The "sweet in-

fluences" or the irritating effects of fine or bad weather, of beautiful or tame scenery, of small cares and petty disappointments, of pleasant associations or unpleasant memories—nay, of a thousand accidental circumstances, and even fancies themselves—will affect considerations totally distinct and apart, as the blue or yellow panes of a stained-glass window cast a melancholy hue or a golden splendor upon the statues and carvings of the cold grey stone.

As Sir Philip gazed upon the fair scene before his eyes, and thought what a lovely spot it was—how calm, how peaceful, how refreshing in its influence—he said to himself,

"No wonder she is unwilling to part with it."

A hare was gambolling upon the lawn, at a distance of about a hundred yards from the house ; now scampering forward and beating up the dew from the morning grass ; now crouched nearly flat, so as hardly to be seen among the tall green

blades ; then hopping quietly along with an awkward, shuffling gait, or sitting up on its hind legs, with raised ears, listening to some distant sound ; but still, as it resumed its gambols, again going round and round, tracing upon the green sward a labyrinth of meandering lines. Sir Philip watched it for several moments with a faint smile, and then said to himself,

“ It is the beast’s nature—why not a woman’s ? ”

Turning himself round, he saw Mrs. Hazleton sitting at the table, with her head leaning in a melancholy attitude upon her hand ; and he replied to her last words, though he had previously made up his mind to give them no answer whatever.

“ The question in regard to title, my dear madam,” he said, “ is one which is to be decided by others. Employ a competent person, and he will ensure, by full investigation, that your rights are maintained entire. Your acceptance of Mr. Marlow’s proposals, contingent on the full recogni-

tion of his claim, will be far from prejudicing your case, should any flaw in his title be discovered. On the contrary, should the decision of law be required, it will put you well with the court. By frankly doing so also, you meet him in the same spirit in which I am sure he comes to you ; and as I am certain he has a very high sense of equity, I think he will be well inclined to enter into any arrangement which may be for your convenience. From what he has said himself, I do not believe he can afford to keep such an establishment as is necessary for this house ; and if you cling to it, as you may well do, doubtless it may remain your habitation as long as you please, at a very moderate rent. Every other particular, I think, may be settled in the same manner, if you will but show a spirit of conciliation, and—”

“ I am sure I have done that,” said Mrs. Hazleton, interrupting him. “ However, Sir Philip, I will leave it all to you. You

must act for me in this business. If you think it right, I will accept the proposal conditionally, as you mention, and the title can be examined fully whenever we can fix upon the time and the person. All this is very hard upon me, I do think ; but I suppose I must submit with a good grace."

"It is certainly the best plan," rejoined Sir Philip.

And while Mrs. Hazleton retired to efface the traces of tears from her eyelids, the baronet walked into the drawing-room, where he was soon after joined by Mr. Marlow. He merely told him, however, that he had conversed with the lady of the house in regard to his claim, and that she would give him her answer in person.

Now, whatever were Mrs. Hazleton's wishes or intentions, she certainly was not well satisfied with the precise and rapid manner in which Sir Philip brought matters of business to an end. His last words, however, had afforded her a glimmering

prospect of somewhat long and frequent communications between herself and Mr. Marlow; and one thing is certain, that she did not at all desire the transactions between them to be concluded too briefly. At the same time, it was not her object to appear otherwise than in the most favourable light to his eyes; and, consequently, when she entered the drawing-room, she held out her hand to him, with a gracious, though rather melancholy, smile, saying—

“I have had a long conversation with Sir Philip this morning, Mr. Marlow, concerning the very painful business which brought you here. I agree at once to your proposal, in regard to the arbitration and the rest.”

She then went on to speak of the whole business, as if she had made not the slightest resistance whatever, but had been struck at once by the liberality of his proposals, and by the sense of equity which they displayed.

Sir Philip took little notice of all this, for he had fallen into one of his fits of musing ; and Mr. Marlow had quitted the room to bring some of the papers, for the purpose of showing them to Mrs. Hazleton, before the baronet awoke out of his reverie. The younger gentleman returned a moment after ; and he and Sir Philip and Mrs. Hazleton were busily looking at a long list of certificates of births, marriages, and deaths, when the door opened, and Mr. Shanks, the attorney, entered the room, booted and spurred and dusty, as if from a long ride. He was a man to whom Sir Philip had a great objection ; but he said nothing ; and the attorney, with a tripping step, advanced towards Mrs. Hazleton.

The lady looked confused and annoyed, and, in a hasty manner, put back the papers into Mr. Marlow's hand. But Mr. Shanks was a keen and observing man of the world. He saw everything about him, as if he had been one of those insects which have I do not know how

many thousand pairs of lenses in each eye. He had no scruples, or hesitation either : he was all sight and all remark ; and a lady of any kind was not at all the person to inspire him with reverence.

He was, in short, all law ; and loved nothing, and respected nothing, but law.

"Dear me, Mrs. Hazleton," he exclaimed, "I did not expect to find you so engaged ! These seem to be law papers—very dangerous, indeed, madam, for unprofessional persons to meddle with such things. Permit me, sir, to look at these."

And he held out his hand towards Mr. Marlow, as if expecting to receive the papers without a word of remonstrance. But Mr. Marlow held them back, saying, in a very calm, civil tone—

"Excuse me, sir ! We are conversing over this matter in a friendly manner, and I shall only show these papers to a lawyer at Mrs. Hazleton's request."

“Very improper—that is, I mean to say, very unprofessional!” exclaimed Mr. Shanks. “And, let me say, very hazardous too,” added he, abruptly.

But Mrs. Hazleton herself interposed, saying, in a marked tone, and with an air of dignity which did not always characterise her demeanour towards her “right-hand man,” as she was accustomed, sometimes, to designate Mr. Shanks—

“We do not desire any interference, at this moment, my good sir. I appointed you at twelve o’clock; it is not yet nine.”

“Oh, I can see—I can see,” returned Mr. Shanks, while Sir Philip Hastings advanced a step or two. “His worship here never was a friend of mine, and has no objection to take a job or two out of my hands, at any time.”

“We have nothing to do with jobs, sir,” said Sir Philip Hastings, in his usual dry tone; “but, at all events, we do not wish you to make a job where there is none.

"I must take the liberty, however, of warning this lady, sir," said Mr. Shanks, with the pertinacity of a ferret, which he so greatly resembled, "as her legal adviser, sir, that if—"

"That if she sends for an attorney, she wants him at the time she appoints," interposed Sir Philip : "that was what you were about to say, I presume."

"Not at all, sir—not at all!" exclaimed the lawyer ; for very shrewd and very oily lawyers will occasionally forget their caution and their coolness, when they see the prospect of a loss of fees before them : "I was going to say no such thing. I was going to warn her not to meddle with matters of business, of which she can understand nothing, by the advice of those who know less, and who may have jobs of their own to settle while they are meddling with hers."

"And I warn you to quit this room, sir," said Sir Philip Hastings, a bright spot

coming into his usually pale cheek. "The lady has already expressed her opinion upon your intrusion ; and, depend upon it, I will enforce mine."

"I shall do no such thing, sir, till I have fully—"

He said no more ; for, before he could conclude the sentence, the hand of Sir Philip Hastings was upon his collar, with the grasp of a giant ; and, although he was a tall and rather powerful man, the Baronet dragged him to the door in despite of his half-choking struggles, as a nurse would haul along a baby, pulled him across the stone hall, and, opening the outer door with his left hand, shot him down the steps without any ceremony, leaving him with his hands and knees upon the terrace.

This being done, the baronet returned into the house, closing the door behind him. He then paused in the hall for an instant, reproaching himself for certain

over-quick beatings of the heart, tranquillized his whole look and demeanour, and then, returning to the drawing-room, resumed the conversation with Mrs. Hazleton, as if nothing had occurred to interrupt it.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. HAZLETON was, or affected to be, a good deal fluttered by the event which had just taken place ; but, after a number of graceful attitudes, assumed without the slightest appearance of affectation, she recovered her calmness, and proceeded with the business in hand. That business was soon terminated, so far as the full and entire acceptance of Mr. Marlow's proposal went ; and immediately after the conclusion of breakfast, Sir Philip Hastings or-

dered his horses to depart. Mrs. Hazleton would fain have detained him, for she foresaw that his going might be a signal for Mr. Marlow's going also ; and it was not a part of her policy to assume the matronly character so distinctly as to invite him to remain in her house alone. Sir Philip, however, was inexorable, and returned to his own dwelling, renewing his invitation to his young acquaintance.

Mrs. Hazleton bade him adieu with the greatest appearance of cordiality ; but I am very much afraid that, if any one had possessed the power of looking into her heart, he would have beheld a picture very different from that presented by her face. Sir Philip Hastings had said and done things since he had entered her dwelling the night before, which Mrs. Hazleton was not very likely to forget or forgive. He had thwarted her schemes—he had mortified her vanity—he had wounded her pride ; and she was one of those women who bide

their time, but have a strong tenacity of resentment.

When he was gone, however, she played a new game with Mr. Marlow. She insisted upon his remaining for the day ; but, with a fine sense of external proprieties, she informed him that she expected a charming elderly lady of her acquaintance to pass a few days with her, to whom she should particularly like to introduce him.

This was false, be it remarked ; but she immediately took measures to make it true. Now, there is in every neighbourhood more than one of that class called good creatures. For this office, an abundant store of real or assumed soft stupidity is required ; but it is a somewhat difficult part to play. With this stupidity, there must also be a considerable portion of fine tact, to guard the performer against any of those blunders into which good-natured people are continually plunging. Drill and discipline are also necessary, in order to be always on the look-out for

hints, to appreciate them properly, to comprehend that friends may say one thing and mean another, and to ask no questions of any kind.

There were no less than three of these good creatures in Mrs. Hazleton's immediate neighbourhood ; and, during a few moments' retreat to her own little writing-room, she laid her finger upon her fair temple, and thought them well over. Mrs. Winifred Edgeley was the first who suggested herself to the mind of the lady. She had many of the requisites ; she dressed well, talked well, had an air of style and fashion about her, was perfectly innocuous, and skilful in divining the purposes and wishes of a friend or patron ; but there was an occasional touch of subacid humour about her, which Mrs. Hazleton did not half like. It gave an impression of seeing too clearly—of perceiving much more than she pretended to perceive.

The second was Mrs. Warmington—a

widow, not very rich, and not, indeed, very refined ; gay, talkative, rather boisterous, yet full of a sound discretion in never committing herself or a friend. She had also much experience ; for she had been twice married, and twice a widow, and thus had had her misfortunes.

The third was a Miss Goodenough, the most silent, quiet, stilly person in the world, moving about a house with the step of a cat, and a face of infinite benevolence to the whole human race. She was to all appearance the pink of gentleness and meek good nature ; but her silence was invaluable.

After some consideration, Mrs. Hazleton decided upon the widow, and instantly despatched a note, with her own carriage, begging Mrs. Warmington to come over immediately, and spend a few days with her, as a young gentleman had arrived upon a visit, and it would be indecorous to entertain him alone.

Mrs. Warmington understood it all in an

instant. She said to herself, "Ho, ho! A young gentleman come to stay!—wanted, a duenna! Matrimony in the wind! Heigho! She must be six-and-thirty—six and-thirty from two-and fifty, leaves sixteen points against me, and long odds. Well, well! I have had my share." And Mrs. Warmington laughed aloud.

However, she would neither keep Mrs. Hazleton's carriage waiting, nor Mrs. Hazleton herself in suspense; for there were various little comforts and conveniences in the good-will of that lady which Mrs. Warmington was eager to cultivate. She had, too, a shrewd suspicion that the enmity of Mrs. Hazleton might become a thing to be seriously dreaded; and, therefore, whichever side of the question she looked at, she saw reasons for seeking the beautiful widow's good graces. Her maid was called, her clothes packed up, and she entered the carriage and drove away; while, in the mean time, Mrs. Hazleton had been expatiating to Mr. Marlow upon all

the high qualities and points of excellence in her friend, Mrs. Warmington. She was too skilful, however, to bring her good taste and judgment into question with her young friend, by raising expectations which might be disappointed. She therefore threw in insinuations of a few faults and failings in dear Madam Warmington's manners and demeanor. But then, she said, she was such a good creature at heart, that, although the very fastidious affected to censure, she herself forgot all little blemishes in the inherent excellence of the person.

Moreover, upon the plea of looking at the ground which was the subject of Mr. Marlow's claim, she led him out for a long, pleasant ramble through the park. She took him amongst old hawthorn trees, through groves of chesnut, by the banks of the stream, and along paths where the warm sunshine played through the brown and yellow leaves above, gilding their companions which had fallen earlier than them-

selves to the sward below. It was a very lover-like walk indeed—one where Nature speaks to the heart, wakening sweet influences, and charming the spirit from hard and cold indifference. Mrs. Hazleton felt sure that Mr. Marlow would not forget that walk, and she took care to impress it as deeply as possible upon his memory. Nor did she want any of the means to do so. Her mind was highly cultivated for the age in which she lived, her taste fine, her information extensive. She could discourse of foreign lands ; of objects and scenes of deep interest, great beauty, and rich associations ; of courts and cities far away ; of music, painting, flowers in other lands ; of climates rich in sunshine and genial warmth ; and over the whole she had the art to cast a sort of magic glow from her own mind which, brightened all she spoke of.

She was very charming, indeed, that day, and Mr. Marlow felt the spell ; but he did not fall in love. Now, what was

the object of using all these powers upon him? Was Mrs. Hazleton a person very susceptible or very covetous of the tender passion? Since her return to England, she had refused some half-dozen very eligible offers from handsome, agreeable, estimable men; and the world in general had set her down for a person as cold as a stone. It might be so; but there are some stones which, when you heat them, acquire intense fervour, and retain it longer than any other substance. Everybody in the world has his peculiarities, his whims, caprices—crotchets, if you will. Mrs. Hazleton had gazed over the handsome, the glittering, and the gay, with the most perfect indifference. She had listened to professions of love with a tranquil, easy, balance-power, which weighed to a grain the advantages of matrimony and widowhood, without suffering the dust of passion to give even a shake to the scale. Before the preceding night, she had only seen Mr. Marlow once; but the moment she

set eyes upon him, the moment she heard his voice, she had said to herself—

“If ever I marry again, that is the man.”

There is no explaining these sympathies, attractions, impulses, or whatever they may be called ; but I think, from some observation of human nature, it will be found that in those persons where they are the least frequent, they are the most powerful and persevering when they do exist.

Not long after their first meeting, some intimation occurred of a claim upon the part of Mr. Marlow to a portion of the lady's property—the portion that she loved best. The very idea of parting with it, of being forced to give it up, was most painful and distressing to her. Yet that made no difference whatever in her feelings towards Mr. Marlow. Communications of various kinds took place between lawyers; and the opposite counsel were as firm as a rock. Mrs. Hazleton thought it very hard, very unjust, very wrong ; but

that changed not, in the least, her feelings towards Mr. Marlow. Nay, more ; with that delicate art of combination, in which ladies are famed to excel, she conceived and manipulated with great dexterity a scheme for bringing herself and Mr. Marlow into frequent personal communication, and for causing somebody to suggest to him a marriage with her own beautiful self, as the best mode of settling the disputed claim.

Oh, those fine and delicate threads of intrigue ! how frail they are, and how much depends upon every one of them, be it in the warp or the woof of a scheme ! We have seen that, in this case, one of them gave way under the rough handling of Sir Philip Hastings, and the whole fabric was in imminent danger of running down and becoming nothing but a raveled skein. Mrs. Hazleton was resolved that it should not be so ; and now she was busily engaged in the attempt to knot together the broken thread, and to lay all the others straight

and in right order again. This was the secret of the whole matter.

She exerted all her charms ; and could the poet Waller but have seen her, we should have had such an account of the artillery of her eyes, the insidious attack of her smile, and the whole host of powerful adversaries brought to bear against the object of her assault, in her gracefully-moving form and heaving bosom, that Sacharissa would have melted away like a wet lump of sugar in the comparison.

Then, again, when she had produced an effect, and saw clearly and distinctly that he thought her very lovely, and very charming too, she seemed to fall into a pleasant sort of languid melancholy, which was even more charming still.

The brook was bubbling and murmuring at their feet, dashing clear and bright over its stony bed, and changing the brown rock, the water-weed, or the leaf beneath, into gems, by the magic of its own brightness.

The boughs were waving over head, covered with many-coloured foliage; and the sun, glancing through, not only enriched the tints above, but chequered the mossy path along which they wandered, like a chess-board of brown and gold. Some of the late Autumn birds uttered their short, sweet song from the copse hard by; and the musical wind came sighing up from the valley, as if Nature had furnished Eolus with a harp. It was, in short, the very moment for a widow to make love to a young man.

They were silent for some little time, and then Mrs. Hazleton said, with her soft, sweet, round voice—

“Is not all this very charming, Mr. Marlow?”

Her tone was quite a sad one—not that sort of pleasant sadness which often mingles with our happiest moments, giving them even a higher zest, like the flattened notes, when a fine piece of music

passes gently from the major into the minor key—but really sad, profoundly sad.

“Very charming indeed,” replied her young companion, looking round to her face with some surprise.

“And what am I to do without it, when you turn me out of my house?” said the lady, answering his glance with a melancholy smile.

“Turn you out of your house!” exclaimed Mr. Marlow. “I hope you do not suppose, my dear madam, that I could dream of such a thing. Oh, no! I would not for the world deprive such a scene of its brightest ornament. Some arrangement can be easily effected, even if my claim should prove satisfactory to those you appoint to investigate it, by which the neighbourhood will not be deprived of the happiness of your presence.”

Mrs. Hazleton felt that she had made a great step; and as she well knew that there was no chance of his proposing then

and there, she resolved not to risk losing ground by any farther advance from that which was gained, even although she secured some present benefits.

"Well, well, Mr. Marlow," she said, "I am quite sure you are very kind and very generous, and we can talk of that matter hereafter. Only there is one thing you must promise me ; which is, that, in regard to any arrangements respecting the house, you will not leave them to be settled by cold lawyers, or colder friends, who cannot enter into my feelings in regard to this place, or your own liberal and kindly feelings either. Let us settle it some day between ourselves," she added, with a light laugh, "in a *tete-à-tete* like this. I do not suppose you are afraid of being over-reached by me in a bargain. But now let us turn our steps back towards the house, for I expect Mrs. Warmington early, and I must not be absent when she arrives."

Mrs. Warmington was there already ;

for the *tete-à-tete* had lasted longer than Mrs. Hazleton knew. However, Mrs. Hazleton's first task was to inform her fair friend and counsellor of the cause of Mr. Marlow's being there ; her next, to tell her that all had been settled as to the claim by that tiresome man, Sir Philip Hastings, without what she considered due deliberation ; and that the only thing which remained to be arranged was in regard to the house, respecting which Mrs. Hazleton communicated a certain portion of her own inclinations and of Mr. Marlow's kind view of the matter.

Now, strange to say, this was the turning point of fate for Mrs. Hazleton, Mr. Marlow, and most of the persons mentioned in this history. It was then that Mrs. Warmington suggested a scheme which she thought would suit her friend well.

" Why do you not offer him in exchange—for the time, at all events—your fine old house on the side of Hartwell, Hartwell Place. It is only seven miles off. It is

ready furnished to his hand, and must be worth a great deal more than the bare walls of this. Besides, it would be pleasant to have him in the neighbourhood."

Pause, Mrs. Hazleton ! pause, and meditate over all the consequences ; for, be assured, much depends upon those few simple words.

Mrs. Hazleton did pause : Mrs. Hazleton did meditate. She ran over in her head the list of all the families in the neighbourhood. In none of them could she see a probable rival. There were plenty of married women, old maids, young girls ; but she saw nobody to fear ; and, with a proud consciousness of her own beauty and power she took her resolution. That very evening she proposed to Mr. Marlow what her friend had suggested. It was accepted.

Mrs. Hazleton had made one miscalculation ; and her fate and Mr. Marlow's were decided.

CHAPTER XIV.

OCCASIONALLY in the life of man, and in the life of the world—as in the course of a stream towards the sea—come quiet lapses, sunny and calm, reflecting nothing but the still, motionless objects around, or the blue sky and moving clouds above. Often, too, we find that this tranquil expanse of silent water follows quickly after some more rapid movement—comes close upon some spot where a dashing rapid has diversified the view, or a cataract, in roar and confusion

and sparkling terror, has broken the course of the stream.

Such a still pause, silent of action—if I may use the term—followed the events which I have related in the last chapter, and extended over a period of nearly six months. Nothing happened worthy of any minute detail. Peace and tranquillity dwelt in the various households which I have noticed in the course of this story ; enlivened in that of Sir Philip Hastings by the gay spirit of Emily Hastings, although somewhat shadowed by the stern character of her father ; and, in the household of Mrs. Hazleton, brightened by the light of hope, and the fair prospect of success in all her schemes, which, for a certain time, continued to open before her.

Mr. Marlow spent only two days at her house, and then went away to London ; but whatever effect her beauty might have produced, his society, brief as it was, served but to confirm her feelings towards him ;

and before he left her, she had made up her mind fully and entirely, with her characteristic vigour and strength of resolution, that her marriage with Mr. Marlow was an event which must and should be. Under this conviction—but not the less strong, not the less energetic, not the less vehement, for being concealed even from herself—was a resolution that no sacrifice, no fear, no hesitation at any course, should stand in the way of her purpose. She did not anticipate many difficulties, certainly, for Mr. Marlow clearly admired her; but the resolution was that, if difficulties should arise, she would overcome them at all cost. Hers was one of those characters of which the world makes its tragedies, having within itself passions too strong and deep to be frequently excited, as the more profound waters, which rise into mountains when once in motion, require a hurricane to stir them. She possessed that energetic will, that fixed, unbending determination, which, like the outburst of a torrent from the

hills, sweeps away all before it ; but let it be remembered, that her energies were exerted upon herself as well as upon others—not in checking passion, not in limiting desire, but in guarding scrupulously every external appearance, and guiding every thought and act with careful art towards its destined object.

Mrs. Hazleton suffered Mr. Marlow to be in London more than a month before she followed to conclude the mere matters of business between them. It cost her a great struggle with herself ; but in that struggle she was successful ; and when, at length, she went, she had several interviews with him. Circumstance—that great enemy of schemes—was against her. Sometimes lawyers were present at these interviews, sometimes impertinent friends ; but Mrs. Hazleton did not much care ; she trusted to the time he was speedily about to pass in the country for the full effect, and, in the mean while, took care that

nothing but the golden side of the shield should be presented to her knight.

The Continent was at that time open to Englishmen for a short period ; and Mr. Marlow expressed his determination of going to the Court of Versailles for a month or six weeks before he came down to take possession of Hartwell Place—everything now having been settled between them in regard to mere business.

Mrs. Hazleton did not like his determination ; yet she did not much fear the result, for Mr. Marlow, being pre-eminently English, was never likely to wed a Frenchwoman : still, she resolved that he should see her under another aspect before he went. She was a great favourite of the Court of those days. Her station, her wealth, her beauty, and her grace, rendered her a brightness and an ornament wherever she came. She was invited to one of the more private, though not less splendid, assemblies of the Palace ; and she contrived that Mr. Marlow should be invited also,

though neither by nature or habit a courtier. She obtained the invitation for him, skilfully saying to the Royal Personage of whom she asked it, that, as he had won a lawsuit against her, she wished to show him that she bore no malice. He went, and found her the brightest in the brilliant scene ; the great and the proud—the handsome and the gay—all bending down and worshipping—all striving for a smile, and obtaining it but scantily. She smiled upon *him*, however—not sufficiently to attract remark from others, but quite sufficiently to mark a strong distinction for his own eyes if he had chosen to use them. He went away to France, and Mrs. Hazleton returned to the country. The winter passed with her in arranging his house for him; and, in so doing, she often had to write to him. His replies were always prompt, kind, and grateful ; and, at length, came the Spring, and the pleasant tidings that he was on his way back to his beloved England.

Alas for human expectation!—Alas for the gay day-dreams of youth—maturity—middle age—old age—for they all have their day-dreams! Every passion which besets man, from the cradle to the grave, has its own visionary expectations. Each creature, from the Tiger to the Beetle, has its besetting insect, which preys upon it,—gnaws it—irritates it; and so have all the ages of the soul and of the heart. Alas, for human speculations of all kinds! Alas, for every hope and aspiration! for those that are pure and high, but which, growing out of earth, bear within themselves the bitter seeds of disappointment; and for those that are dark and low, and produce germs of the most poisonous hybrid, where failure is united with remorse.

“Happy is the man that expecteth nothing; for verily he shall not be disappointed!” It is a quaint old saying. But to aspire was the ordinance of God; and, viewed rightly, the withering of the

flowers upon each footstep we have taken upwards is no discouragement ; for, if we shape our path aright, a wreath of brighter blossoms crowns each craggy peak before us, as we ascend to snatch the garland of immortal glory placed just beyond the last awful leap of death.

Mrs. Hazleton, however, thought of little beyond this life : she had never been taught so to think. Some are led astray from the path of noble daring, to others as difficult and more intricate, by a loud shout of passion on the right or on the left ---and seek in vain to return. Some who are misled by an apparent similarity in the course of two paths---although the finger-post says, " Thus shalt thou go !"---think that the way so plainly beaten, and so seemingly easy, must surely lead to the desired point. Others, again, never learn to read the right path from the wrong---and Mrs. Hazleton was one ; while many shut their eyes to all direction, fix their gaze upon the

summit, and strain up, now amidst flowers, and now amidst thorns, till they are cast back from the face of some steep precipice to perish in the deserts at the foot.

Mrs. Hazleton's aspirations were all earthly, and that was the secret of her only want in beauty. That divine form—that resplendent countenance beamed with every earthly grace, and sparkled forth mind and intellect at every dart of the eye ; but these glances were wanting in soul, in spirit, and in heart. Life was there ; but the life of life, the intense flame of immortal, *over earthly* intelligence, was wanting. She might be the grandest animal that ever was seen—the most bright and capable intellect that ever dealt in mortal things ; but the fine golden chain which leads on the electric fire from intellectual eminence to spiritual pre-eminence—from mind to soul—from earth to heaven—was wanting, or had been broken. Her loveliness none could doubt ;

her charm of manner none could deny ; her intellectual superiority all admitted ; her womanly softness added a grace beyond them all. But one grace was wanting—the grace of a high, holy soul, which, in those who have it—be they fair, be they ugly—pours forth as an emanation from every look and every action, and invests them with radiance faintly imaged by the artist's glory round a saint.

Alas for human aspirations ! Alas for the expectations of this fair, frail creature ! How eagerly she thought of Mr. Marlow's return—how eagerly she anticipated their meeting again ! How she calculated upon all that would be said and done during the next few weeks ! The first news she received was, that he had arrived, and, with a few servants, had taken possession of his new dwelling. She remained all day in her own house : she ordered no carriage, she took no walk ; she tried to read ; she played upon various instruments

of music ; she thought each instant he would come, at least, for a few moments, to thank her for all the care she had bestowed to make his habitation comfortable. The sun gilded the west ; the melancholy moon rose up in soft splendour ; the hours passed by ; and he came not.

The next morning she heard that he had ridden over to the house of Sir Philip Hastings ; and indignation warred with love in her bosom. She thought he must certainly come that day ; and she resolved angrily to upbraid him for his want of courtesy. Luckily, however, for her, he did not come that day either ; and a sort of melancholy took possession of her. Luckily, I say ; for when passion takes hold of a scheme, it is generally sure to shake it to pieces ; and melancholy loosened the grasp of passion, for a time. The next day he *did* come, and with an air so easy and unconscious of offence, as almost to provoke her into vehemence again. He

knew not what she felt—he had no idea how he had been looked for. *He* was as ignorant that she had ever thought of him as a husband, as *she* was that he had ever compared her in his mind to his own mother.

He talked quietly, indifferently, of his having been over to the house of Sir Philip Hastings; adding merely—not as an excuse, but as a simple fact—that he had been unable to call there, as he promised, before leaving the country. He dilated upon the kind reception he had met with from Lady Hastings, for Sir Philip was absent upon business; and he went on to dwell rather largely upon the exceeding beauty and grace of Emily Hastings. Oh, how Mrs. Hazleton hated her! It requires but a few drops of poison to envenom a whole well.

He did worse. He proceeded to descant upon her character—upon the blended lightness and serious thought, the deep-

souled * emotions and child-like sparkle, of her disposition—upon the simplicity and complexity, the many-sided splendour, of her character, which, like the cut diamond, reflected each ray of light in a thousand varied and dazzling hues. Oh, how Mrs. Hazleton hated her!—hated, because, for the first time, she began to fear. He had spoken to her in praise of another woman—with loud encomiums, too, with a brightened eye, and a look which told her more than his words. These were signs not to be mistaken. They did not show in the least that he loved Emily Hastings; and that she knew right well: but they showed he did not love *her*; and there was the poison in the cup.

So painful, so terrible, was the sensation, that, with all her mastery over herself, she could not conceal the agony under which she writhed. She became silent, grave—fell into fits of thought, which clouded the broad brow, and made the finely-cut lip

quiver. Mr. Marlow was surprised and grieved. He asked himself what could be the matter. Something evidently had made her sorrowful ; and he could not trace the sorrow to its source, for she carefully avoided uttering one word in depreciation of Emily Hastings. In this she showed no woman's spirit. She could have stabbed her, had the girl been there in her presence ; but she would not scratch her. Petty spite was too low for her—too small for the character of her mind. Hers was a heart capable of revenge, and would be satisfied with nothing less.

Mr. Marlow soothed her ; spoke to her kindly, tenderly ; tried to lead her mind away—to amuse, to entertain her. Oh, it was all gall and bitterness ! He might have cursed, abused, insulted her, without, perhaps, diminishing her love—certainly without inflicting half the anguish that was caused by his gentle words. It is impossible to tell all the varied emotions that

went on in her heart—at least, it is impossible for me. Shakspeare could have done it ; but none less than Shakspeare. For a moment, she knew not whether she loved or hated him ; but she soon felt and knew that it was love ; and the hate, like lightning striking a rock, and glancing from the solid stone to rend a sapling, all turned away, to fall upon the head of poor, unconscious Emily Hastings.

Though she could not recover from the blow she had received, yet she soon regained command over herself—conversed, smiled, banished absorbing thought ; answered calmly, pertinently ; even spoke, in her own brilliant way, with a few more figures and ornaments than usual—for figures are things rather of the head than of the heart, and it was from the head that she was now speaking.

At length Mr. Marlow took his leave, and, for the first time in her life, she was glad he was gone.

Mrs. Hazleton gave way to no burst of passion ; she shed not a tear ; she uttered no exclamation. That which was within her heart, was too intense for any such ordinary expression. She seated herself at a table, leaned her head upon her hand, and fixed her eyes upon one bright spot in the marquetry. There she sat for more than an entire hour without motion. In the meantime, what were the thoughts which passed through her brain ? We have shown the feelings of her heart enough. She formed plans ; she determined her course ; she looked around for means : various persons suggested themselves to her mind as instruments. Among others, were the three women I have mentioned in the preceding chapter—the good sort of friends. But it was an agent she wanted—not a confidant. No, no. Mrs. Hazleton knew better than to have a confidant. She was her own council-keeper, and she knew it. Nevertheless, these good ladies might serve

to act in subordinate parts ; and she assigned to each of them her position in the scheme, with wonderful accuracy and skill.

As she did so, however, she remembered it was by the advice of Mrs. Warmington that she had brought Mr. Marlow to Hartwell Place ; and in her soul's secret chamber she gave her fair friend a goodly *benediction*. She resolved to use her, nevertheless—to use her as far as she could be serviceable ; and she forgot not that she herself had been art and part in the scheme that had failed. She was not one to shelter herself from blame by casting the whole storm of disappointment upon another. She took her own full share.

“ If *she* was a fool so to advise,” thought Mrs. Hazleton, “ *I* was a greater fool to follow her advice.”

She then turned to seek for the agent. No name presented itself but that of Shanks, the attorney ; and she smiled bit-

terly when she thought of him. She recollected that Sir Philip Hastings had thrown him head-foremost down the steps of the terrace ; and that was very satisfactory to her ; for although Mr. Shanks was a man who sometimes bore injuries very meekly, he never forgot them.

Nevertheless, she had a difficult part to play ; for most agents have a desire of becoming confidants also, and Mrs. Hazleton determined that her attorney should not be placed in that category. The task was to *insinuate* her purposes rather than to speak them—to act without betraying the motives of action—to make another act without committing herself by giving directions.

Mrs. Hazleton arranged it all to her own satisfaction. Amongst the apparently extinct ashes of former schemes, one small spark of hope began to glow, giving promise for the time to come. What did she propose ? At first, nothing more than to drive Sir Philip Hastings and his family from the country, mingling the gratification of

personal hatred with efforts for the accomplishment of her own purposes. It was a bold attempt ; but Mrs. Hazleton had her plan ; and she sat down and wrote for Mr. Shanks, the attorney.

CHAPTER XV

DECORUM came in with the house of Hanover. I know not whether men and women in England were more virtuous before—I think not—but they were certainly more frank in both their virtues and their vices. Fewer of those veils of conventionality were thrown around the human heart—fewer, I mean to say, of those cold restraints—those gilded chains of society, which, like the ornaments that ladies wear upon their necks and arms

resemble fetters, yet restrain but little human action, curb no passion, and are to the strong will but as the green rushes round the limbs of the Hebrew giant. Decorum came into England with the house of Hanover : but I am speaking of a period before that, when ladies were less fearful of the tongue of scandal—when scandal itself was fearful of assailing virtue—when honesty of purpose and purity of heart could walk free in the broad day, and men did not venture to suppose evil acts perpetrated whenever by a possibility they could be committed.

Emily Hastings walked gaily along by the side of Mr. Marlow, through her father's park. No third person was with them—no keen matron's ear to listen to and weigh their words—no brother to pretend to accompany them, and either feel himself weary with the task, or lighten it by seeking his own amusement apart. They were alone together ; and they talked without restraint. Ye gods, how

they did talk! The dear girl was in one of her brightest, gayest moods. There was nothing that did not move her fancy, or become a servant to it. The clouds, as they shot across the sky—the blue, fixed hills in the distance—the red and yellow and green colouring of the young budding oaks—the dancing of the stream—the song of the bird—the whisper of the wind—the misty light of Spring which spread over the morning distance;—all had illustration for her thoughts. It seemed that day as if she could not speak without a figure—as if she revelled in the flowers of imagination, like a child tossing about the new-mown grass in a hay-field. And he, with joyous sport, took pleasure in furnishing her, at every moment, with new materials for the bounding play of fancy.

They had not known each other long; but there was something in the young man's manner—nay, let me go farther—something in his character, which invited confidence, which besought the hearts

around to throw off all strange disguise, and promised that he would take no base advantage of their openness. That something was, perhaps, his earnestness. One felt that he was true in all he said, or did, or looked ; that his words were but his spoken feelings ; his countenance a page on which the heart at once recorded its sensations. But let me not be mistaken. Do not let it be supposed that, when I say he was earnest, I mean that he was grave. Oh, no ! Earnestness can exist as well in the merriest as in the soberest heart. One can be as earnest, as truthful, even as eager, in joy or sport, as in sorrow or sternness. But he was earnest in all things ; and it was this earnestness which probably found a way for him to so many dissimilar hearts.

Emily knew not at all what it was doing with her ; but she felt that he was one before whom she had no need to hide a thought : that if she were gay, she might

be gay safely ; that if she were inclined to muse, she might muse on in peace.

Onward they walked, talking of everything on earth, but love. It was not in the thoughts of either. Emily knew nothing about it. The tranquil expanse of life had never for her been even rippled by the wind of passion. Marlow might know more ; but, for this time, he was lost in the enjoyment of the moment. The little enemy might be carrying on the war against the fortress of each unconscious bosom ; but, if so, it was by the silent sap and mine, more potent far than fierce assault or thundering cannonade—at least in this sort of warfare.

They were winding their way towards a gate, at the very extreme limit of the park, which opened upon a path, leading by a much shorter way than the road he usually pursued, to Mr. Marlow's own dwelling. He had that morning come to spend but an hour at the house of Sir Philip Hast-

ings, and he had an engagement at his own house at noon. He had spent two hours instead of one with Emily and her mother, and therefore short paths were preferable to long ones for his purpose. Emily had offered to show him the way to the gate; and her company was sure to shorten the road, though it might lengthen the time it took to travel.

Now, in describing the park of Sir Philip Hastings, I have said that there was a wide open space around the mansion; but I have also said that at some distance the trees were thick and sombre. Those nearest to the house grouped themselves together in clumps, confusing the eye in a wilderness of hawthorns, and beeches, and ever-green oaks, while beyond appeared a denser mass of wood; and both through the scattered tufts of trees and thick woodland at the extreme of the park, ran paths traced by deer and park-keepers and country folk. Thus, for various reasons, some guid-

ance was needful to Marlow on his way ; and, for more reasons still, he was well-pleased that the guide should be Emily Hastings.

In the course of their walk, amongst many other subjects, they spoke of Mrs. Hazleton ; and Marlow expatiated warmly on her beauty, and grace, and kindness of heart. How different was the effect of all this upon Emily Hastings from that which his words in her praise had produced upon her of whom he spoke ! Emily's heart was free. Emily had no schemes, no plans, no purposes. She knew not that one feeling was in her bosom with which praise of Mrs. Hazleton would ever jar. She loved her well. Such eyes as hers are not practised in seeing into darkness. She had divined the Italian singer—perhaps by instinct—perhaps by some distinct trait, which occasionally will betray the most wily. But Mrs. Hazleton was a fellow-woman—a woman of great brightness and many fine qualities. Neither

had she any superficial defects to indicate a baser or harder metal within. If she was not all gold, she was doubly gilt.

Emily praised her too, warmed with the theme, and eagerly exclaimed,

"She always seems to me like one of those dames of fairy tales upon whom some enchanter has bestowed a charm that no one can resist. It is not her beauty ; for I feel the same when I hear her voice and shut my eyes. It is not her conversation ; for I feel the same when I look at her and she is silent. It seems to breathe from her presence like the odour of a flower. It is the same when she is grave as when she is gay."

"Ay! and when she is melancholy," replied Marlow. "I never felt it more powerfully than a few days ago when I spent an hour with her, and when she was not only grave but sad."

"Melancholy!" exclaimed Emily. "I never saw her so. I have seen her grave

—thoughtful—silent ; but never sad ; and I do not know that she has not seemed more charming to me in those graver, stiller moods, than in more cheerful ones. Do you know that, in looking at the beautiful statues which I have seen in London, I have often thought they might lose half their charm if they could move and speak. Thus, too, with Mrs. Hazleton : she seems to me even more lovely—more full of grace—in perfect stillness than at any other time. My father,” she added, after a moment’s pause, “is the only one who, in her presence, is spell-proof.”

Her words threw Marlow into a momentary fit of thought.

“Why,” he asked himself, “is Sir Philip Hastings spell-proof, when all others are charmed ?”

Men have a habit of depending much upon the judgment of men—whether justly or unjustly I will not stop to inquire. They rely less upon woman’s judgment ;

and yet women are amongst the keenest discerners when they are unbiassed by passion. But are they often so? Perhaps it is from a conviction that men judge less frequently from impulse—decide more generally from cause—that this presumption of their accuracy exists. Woman—perhaps from situation, perhaps from nature—is more a creature of instincts than man. They are given her for defence where reason would act too slowly ; and where they act strongly, they are almost invariably right. Man goes through the slower process, and naturally relies more firmly on the result ; for reason demonstrates, while instinct leads blindfold.

Marlow judged Sir Philip Hastings by himself, and fancied that he must have some cause for being spell-proof against the fascinations of Mrs. Hazleton. This roused the first doubt in his mind as to her being all that she seemed. He repelled the doubt as injurious ; but it returned from time to time in after days, and at

length gave him a clue to an intricate labyrinth.

The walk came to an end too quickly, he thought. Emily pointed out the gate as soon as it appeared in sight, shook hands with him, and returned homeward. He thought more of her after they had parted than when she was with him. There are times when the most thoughtful do not think—when they enjoy. But now every word, every look, of her who had just left him, came back to memory. Not that he would admit to himself that there was the least touch of love in his feelings. Oh no! He had known her too short a time for such a serious passion as love to have anything to do with his sensations. He only thought of her—mused—pondered—recalled all she had said and done, because she was so unlike anything he had seen or heard of before—a something new, a something to be studied.

She was but a girl—a mere child, he said; and yet there was more

than childish grace in that light but rounded form, where beauty was more than budding, yet not quite blossomed, like a moss-rose in its loveliest stage of loveliness. And her mind, too; there was nothing childish in her thoughts, except their playfulness. The morning dew-drops had not yet exhaled; but the day-star of the mind was well up in the sky.

She was one of those on whom it is dangerous for a man, afraid of love, to meditate too long. She was one, the effect of whose looks and words is not evanescent. That of mere beauty passes away. How many a face do we see, and think it the loveliest in the world; yet shut the eyes an hour after, and try to recall the features—to paint them to the mind's eye. You cannot. But there are others that link themselves with every feeling of the heart, that twine themselves with constantly—recurring thoughts never to be effaced—never forgotten—on which age or time; disease or death, may do its work with-

out effecting one change on the reality embalmed in memory. Destroy the die, break the mould, you may ; but the medal and the cast remain. Had Marlow lived a hundred years—had he never seen Emily Hastings again—not one line of her bright face, not one speaking look, would have passed from his memory. He could have painted a portrait of her, had he been an artist. Did you ever gaze long at the sun, trying your eyes against the eagle's ? If so, you have had the bright image of the great orb floating before your eyes the whole day after. And so it was with Marlow. Throughout the long hours that followed, he had Emily Hastings ever before him. But yet he did not love her. Love, he thought, was very different from mere admiration ; it was a plant of slower growth. He was no believer in love at first sight. He was an infidel as to Romeo and Juliet, and had firmly resolved that if ever he did fall in love, it should be done cautiously.

Poor man ! he little knew how deep he was in, already.

In the meanwhile, Emily walked onward. *She* was heart-whole at least ; she had never dreamed of love ; it had not been one of her studies ; her father had never presented the idea to her. Her mother had often talked of marriage and marriages, good and bad ; but always put them in the light of alliances, compacts, negotiated treaties. Although Lady Hastings understood love as well as any one, and had felt it as deeply, yet she did not wish her daughter to be as romantic as she had been : and therefore the subject was avoided.

Emily thought a good deal of Mr. Marlow, it is true. She thought him handsome, graceful, winning,—one of the pleasantest companions she had known. She liked him better than any one she had ever seen, and his words rang in her ears long after they were spoken. But even imagination, wicked spinner of golden

threads as she is, never drew one link between his fate and hers. The time had not yet come, if it ever was to come.

She walked on through the wood, and, just when she was emerging from the thicker part into the clumps and scattered trees, she saw a stranger before her, leaning against the stump of an old hawthorn, and seeming to suffer pain. He was young, handsome, and well-dressed; and a gun lay at his feet. As Emily drew nearer, she saw blood slowly trickling from his arm, and falling on the grey sand of the path.

She was not one to suffer shyness to curb humanity; and she exclaimed at once, with a look of alarm—

“I am afraid you are hurt, sir. Had you not better come up to the house?”

The young man looked at her faintly, and answered in a low tone—

“The gun was caught by a branch, went off, and has shattered my arm. I thought I could reach the cottage by the park gates; but I feel faint.”

"Stay, stay a moment," cried Emily.
"I will run to the Hall, and bring assistance—people to assist you up—or a carriage."

"No, no!" interrupted the stranger, quickly.
"I cannot go there—I will not go there! The cottage is nearer," he continued, more calmly. "I think, with a little help, I could reach it, if I could stanch the blood."

"Let me try," said Emily; and, with ready zeal, she tied her handkerchief round his arm; not without a shaking hand, indeed, but with firmness and some skill.

"Now, lean upon me," she continued, when she had done. "The cottage indeed is nearer; but you would have better tendance if you could reach the Hall."

"No, no—the cottage," rejoined the stranger; "I shall do well there."

The cottage was, perhaps, two hundred yards nearer to the spot on which they stood than the Hall; but there was an eagerness about the young man's refusal to go to the latter which Emily remarked.

Suspicion, indeed, was alien to her mind ; but those were days when laws concerning game, which have every year been becoming less and less strict, were hardly less severe than in the time of William Rufus. Every day, in the country life which she led, she heard some tale of poaching or its punishment. The stranger had a gun with him ; she had found him in her father's park ; he was unwilling, even in suffering and need of help, to go up to the Hall for succour ; and she could not but fancy that, for some jest, or some wild whim, he had been trespassing upon the manor in pursuit of game. That he was an ordinary poacher she could not suppose : his dress, his appearance, forbade such a supposition.

But there was something more.

In the young man's face—more in its expression than its features, perhaps—more in certain marking lines and sudden glances than in the general whole—there was something familiar to her—something

that seemed akin to her. He was handsomer than her father : of a more perfect though less lofty character of physiognomy ; and yet there was a strange likeness, not constant, but flashing occasionally upon her, how—in what—or when—she could hardly determine.

It roused another sort of sympathy from any she had felt before ; and once more she urged him to go up to the Hall.

“If you have been taking your sport,” she said, “where, perhaps, you ought not, I am sure my father will overlook it without a word, when he sees how you are hurt. Although people sometimes think he is stern and severe, that is all a mistake. He is kind and gentle, I assure you, when he does not feel that duty requires him to be rigid.”

The stranger gave a quick start, and replied in a tone which would have been haughty and fierce, had not weakness subdued it—

“I have been shooting only where I

have a right to shoot. I will not go up to the Hall till — But I dare say I can get to the cottage without help, Mistress Emily. I have been accustomed to do without help in the world.” And he withdrew his arm from that which supported him.

The next moment, however, he tottered and seemed ready to fall; and Emily again hurried to help him. No more words were spoken. Though she thought his manner somewhat uncivil, she would not leave him ; and the necessity for her kindness was soon apparent. Before they were within a hundred yards of the cottage, he sank slowly down. His face grew pale and death-like ; and his eyes closed faintly as he lay on the turf.

Emily ran on like lightning to the cottage, and called out the old man who lived there. The old man called his son from the little garden ; and, with his and other help, carried the fainting man in.

“ Ah, Master John !” exclaimed the old

cottager, as he laid him in his own bed ;
“ one of your wild freaks, I warrant ! ”

His wife, his son, and he himself, tended the young man with care ; and a boy was sent off for a surgeon.

Emily did not know what to do ; but compassion kept her in the cottage till the stranger recovered his consciousness ; and then, after inquiring how he felt, she was about to withdraw, intending to send down further aid from the Hall.

But the stranger beckoned her faintly to come nearer, and said, in tones of real gratitude—

“ Thank you a thousand times, Mistress Emily. I never thought to meet such kindness at *your* hands. But now do me another, and say not a word to any one at the mansion of what has happened. It will be better for me, for you, for your father, that you should not speak of this business.”

“ Do not!—do not, Mistress Emily ! ” cried the old man, who was standing near.

"It will only make mischief, and bring about evil."

He spoke evidently under strong apprehension ; and Emily was much surprised to find that one, quite a stranger to her, knew her at once, and that the old cottager, a long dependent upon her family, seconded so eagerly his strange injunction.

"I will say nothing, unless questions are asked me," she replied ; "then, of course, I must tell the truth."

"Better not," observed the young man, gloomily.

"I cannot speak falsely," replied Emily. "I cannot deal doubly with my parents or with any one." And she turned away.

But the stranger besought her to stop one moment, and said, "I have not strength to explain all now ; but I shall see you again, and then I will tell you why I have spoken, as you think, strangely. I shall see you again : in common charity, you will come to ask if I am alive or dead.

·If you knew how near we are to each other, I am sure you would promise."

"I can make no such promise," replied Emily.

But the old cottager seemed eager to end the interview, and, speaking for her, he exclaimed, "Oh, she will come, I am sure. Mistress Emily will come."

He then hurried her away, seeing her back to the little gate in the park wall.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. HAZLETON found Mr. Shanks, her attorney, the most difficult person to deal with whom she had ever met in her life. She had remarked that he was keen, active, intelligent, unscrupulous, confident in his own powers, bold as a lion in the wars of quill, parchment, and red tape, without hesitation, without remorse. There was nothing that he scrupled to do; nothing that he ever repented having

done. She had fancied that the only difficulty which she could have to encounter, was that of concealing from him, at least in a degree, the ultimate objects and designs which she herself had in view.

So shrewd people often deceive themselves as to the character of other shrewd people. The difficulty was quite of another kind. It consisted of a peculiar sort of stolidity on the part of Mr. Shanks, for which she was utterly unprepared.

Now, the attorney was ready to do anything on earth which his fair patroness wished. He would have perilled his name on the roll in her service ; and was only eager to understand what were her desires, even without giving her the trouble of explaining them. Moreover, there was no point of law or equity, no manœuvre of roguery or chicanery, no object of avarice, covetousness, or ambition, which he could not have comprehended at once. They were things within his own ken and scope, to which the inlets and avenues of his

mind were always open. But to other passions—to deeper, more remote, motives and emotions—Mr. Shanks was as dull as a door post. It was requisite to hew a way, as it were, to his perceptions—to tunnel his mind for the passage of a new idea.

The only passion which afforded the slightest cranny of an opening was revenge; and after having tried a dozen other ways of making him comprehend what she wished without committing herself, Mrs. Hazleton got him to understand that she thought Sir Philip Hastings had injured—at all events that he had offended—her, and that she sought vengeance. Mr. Shanks could understand the feeling, though not its extent. He would himself have given ten pounds out of his own pocket—the largest sum he had ever given in life for anything but an advantage—to be revenged upon the same man for the insult he had undergone; and he could perceive that Mrs. Hazleton would go much farther, without, indeed,

being able to conceive, or even dream of, the extent to which she was prepared to go.

However, when he had once got the clue, he was prepared to run along the road with all celerity, and now she found him everything she had expected. He was a man copious in resources, prolific of schemes. His imagination had exercised itself through life in devising crooked paths; but in this instance the road was straightforward before him. He would rather it had been tortuous, it is true; but for the sake of his dear lady he was ready to follow even a direct path; and he explained to her that Sir Philip Hastings stood in a somewhat dangerous position.

He was proceeding to enter into the details, but Mrs. Hazleton interrupted him, and, to his surprise, not only told him, but showed him that she knew all the particulars.

"The only question is, Mr. Shanks," she said, "is—can you prove the marriage of his

elder brother to this woman before the birth of the child ?”

“ We think we can, madam,” replied the attorney—“ we think we can. There is a very strong letter ; and there has been evidently—”

He paused and hesitated ; and Mrs. Hazleton demanded—

“ There has been what, Mr. Shanks ?”

“ A leaf evidently torn out of the registrar,” replied the lawyer.

Something in his manner made the lady gaze keenly in his face ; but she would ask no questions on that subject ; and she merely said,

“ Then why has not the case gone on, as it was put in your hands six months ago ?”

“ Why, you see, my dear madam,” replied Shanks, “ law is at best uncertain. One wants two or three great lawyers to make a case. Money was short. John and his mother have spent all last year’s

annuity. Barristers won't plead without fees ; and, beside—"

He paused again, but an impatient gesture from the lady urged him on.

"Besides," he said, "I had devised a little scheme—which, of course, I shall abandon now—for marrying him to Mistress Emily Hastings. He is a very handsome young fellow, and—"

"I have seen him," said Mr. Hazleton, thoughtfully. "But why should you abandon this scheme, Mr. Shanks ? It seems to me by no means a bad one."

The poor lawyer was now all at sea again ; and fancied himself as wide of the lady's aim as ever.

Mrs. Hazleton suffered him to remain in this dull suspense some time. Wrapped up in her own thoughts, and busy with her own calculations, she suffered several minutes to elapse without adding a word to that which had so much surprised the attorney. Then, however, she said, in a meditative tone—

"There is only one way by which it can be accomplished. If you allow it to be conducted in a formal manner, you will fail utterly. Sir Philip will never consent. She will never yield."

"But, if Sir Philip is made to see that it will save him a tremendous law-suit, and, perhaps, his whole estate,"—suggested Mr. Shanks.

"He will resist the more firmly," interposed the lady ; "if it saved his life, he would reject it with scorn. No! But there is a way. If you can persuade her—if you will show her, that her father's safety, and his position in life, depend upon her conduct ; perhaps you may bring her, by degrees, to consent to a private marriage. She is young, inexperienced, enthusiastic, romantic. She loves her father devotedly, and would make any sacrifice for him."

"No great sacrifice, I should think, madam," observed Mr. Shanks, "to marry

a handsome young man, who has a just claim to a large fortune."

"That is as people may judge," replied the lady ; "but, at all events, this claim gives us a hold upon her, which we must not fail to use, and that directly. I will contrive means of bringing them together. I will make opportunity for the young man; but you must instruct him how to use it properly. All I can do, is to co-operate without appearing."

"But, my dear madam, I really do not understand," said Mr. Shanks, "I had a fancy—a sort of imagination—that you wished—that you desired—"

He hesitated ; but Mrs. Hazleton would not help him by a single word, and at last he added,

"I had a fancy that you desired this suit to go on against Sir Philip Hastings ; and now—but that does not matter. Only do you really wish to bring it all to an end—to settle it by a marriage between John and Mistress Emily ?"

"That will be the pleasantest—the easiest way of settling it, sir," replied Mrs. Hazleton, coolly ; "and I do not at all desire to injure, but rather to serve, Sir Philip and his family."

That was false ; for, though to marry Emily Hastings to any one but Mr. Marlow the lady did very sincerely desire, yet there was a long account to be settled with Sir Philip Hastings, which would not be discharged without a certain amount of injury to him and his. The lady was well aware, too, that she had told a lie, and, moreover, that it was one which Mr. Shanks was not at all likely to believe. Perhaps she did not quite wish him to believe it ; and, at all events, she knew that her actions must soon give it contradiction. But men make strange distinctions between speech and action, not to be accounted for without long investigation and disquisition. There are cases when people shrink from defining in words their purposes, or giving voice to their feelings, even when they are

prepared by acts to stamp them for eternity. There are cases where men dare to do acts which they dare not cover by a lie.

Mrs. Hazleton sought for no less than the ruin of Sir Philip Hastings: she had determined it in her own heart; and yet she would not avow it to her own agent;—perhaps she would not own it to herself. There is a dark, secret chamber in the brain of every one, at the door of which the eyes of the spirit are blindfolded, that it may not see the things to which it is consenting. Conscience records them silently: and, sooner and later, her book is to be opened—it may be in this world—it may be in the next—but, for the time, is in the keeping of Passion, who rarely suffers the pages to be seen till purpose has been ratified by act, and Remorse stands ready to pronounce the doom.

There were a pause after Mrs. Hazleton had spoken, for the attorney was busy also with thoughts he wished to utter, yet

dared not speak. The fine prospect of a law-suit—the only sort of the picturesque in which he could find pleasure—a long, intricate, expensive law-suit, was fading before his eyes as if a mist were coming over the scene. Where were his consultations, his letters, his briefs, his pleas, his rejoinders, his demurrers, appeals? Where were the fees—the bright golden fees? True, in the hopelessness of his young client's fortunes, he had urged the marriage with a proviso, that, if it took place by his skilful management, a handsome bonus was to be his share of the spoil. But then Mrs. Hazleton's first communication had raised brighter hopes—had put him more in his own element—had opened to him a scene of achievement as glorious to his notions as victory in the listed field to knight of old; and now all was vanishing away. Yet he did not venture to tell her how much he was disappointed; still less to shew her why and how.

It was the lady who spoke first; and

she did so in as calm, deliberate, passionless a tone as if she had been devising the fashion of a new mantua.

"It may be as well, Mr. Shanks," she said, "in order to produce the effect we wish upon dear Emily's mind,"—*dear Emily!*—"to commence the suit against Sir Philip—I mean to take those first steps which may create some alarm—I cannot, of course, judge what they ought to be; but you must know; and if not, you must seek advice from counsel learned in the law. You understand what I mean, doubtless?"

"Oh, certainly, madam, certainly," replied Mr. Shanks, with a profound sigh of relief. "First steps commit us to nothing; but they must be devised cautiously; and I am very much afraid that—that—"

"Afraid of what, sir?" interrupted Mrs. Hazleton, in a stern tone.

"Only that the expense will be greater than my young client can afford," answered

the lawyer, seeing that he must come to the point.

"Let not that stand in the way," said Mrs. Hazleton, at once; "I will supply the means. What will be the expense?"

"Would you object to say five hundred pounds?" asked the lawyer, cautiously.

"A thousand!" replied the lady, with a slight inclination of the head; and then, weary of circumlocution, she added, in a bolder tone than she had yet used, "Only remember, sir, that what is done must be done effectually; no mistakes—no errors—no flaws! See that you use all your eyes—see that you bend every nerve to the task. I will have no procrastination for the sake of fresh fees—nothing omitted one day to be remembered the next—no blunder to be corrected after long delays and longer correspondence. I know you lawyers and your ways right well; and if I find that, for the sake of swelling a bill to the bursting, you attempt to procrastinate, the cause

shall be taken at once from your hands, and placed in those who will do their work more speedily. You can practise such tricks upon those who are more or less in your power ; but you shall not play them upon me."

"I declare, my dear madam—I can assure you—"said Mr. Shanks ; but Mrs. Hazleton cut him short.

"There—there !" she said, waving her hand. "Do not declare—do not assure me of anything. Let your actions speak, Mr. Shanks. I am too much accustomed to declarations and assurances, to set much value upon them. Now tell me—but in as few words, and with as few cant terms as possible—what are the chances of success in this suit ? How does this young man's cause really stand ?"

Mr. Shanks would gladly have been excused such explanations. He never liked to speak clearly upon such delicate questions ; but he would not venture to refuse

any demand of Mrs. Hazleton ; and therefore he began with a circumlocution in regard to the uncertainty of law, and to the impossibility of giving any exact assurances of success.

The lady would not be driven from her point, however.

"That is not what I sought to know," she said. "I am as well aware of the law's uncertainty, and of its iniquity, as you. But I ask you, what grounds have you to go upon ? Were they ever really married ? Is this son legitimate ?"

"His mother says they were married," replied Mr. Shanks, cautiously ; "and I have good hope we can prove the legitimacy. There is a letter in which the late Mr. John Hastings calls her 'my dear little wife ;' and then, as I have already said, a leaf has evidently been torn out of the marriage registry about that very time."

Mr. Shanks spoke the last words slowly, and with some hesitation ; but, after a

a pause, he went on more boldly and rapidly.

"Then we have a deposition of the old woman, Danby, 'that they were married.' This is clear and precise," he continued; with a grin. "She wanted to put in something about 'in the eyes of God;' but I left that out, as beside the question; and she did the swearing very well. She might have broken down under cross-examination, it is true; and therefore it was as well to put off the trial till she was gone. We can prove, moreover, that the late Sir John always paid an annuity to both mother and child in order to make them keep secret. Nay, more—that he bribed the old woman, Danby. This is our strong point; but it is beyond doubt: I can prove it, madam—I can prove it! All I fear is the mother. She is weak—very weak. I wish to Heaven she were out of the way till the trial is over."

"Send her out of the way," cried Mrs.

Hazleton, decidedly. "Send her to France." And then she added, with a bitter smile. "She may still figure amongst the beauties of Versailles."

"But she will not go," replied Mr. Shanks—"madam, she will not go. I hinted at such a step—mentioned even Cornwall or Ireland—any place where she could be concealed."

"Cornwall or Ireland!" exclaimed Mrs. Hazleton. "Of course, she would not go. Why did you not propose Africa or the Plantations? She shall go, Mr. Shanks. Leave her to me—she *shall* go. And now set to work at once—immediately I say—this very day. Send the young man to me to-morrow, and let him bring me word that some step is taken. *I* will instruct him how to act, while *you* deal with the law."

Mr. Shanks promised to obey, and retired, overawed by all he had seen and heard. There had, it is true, been no vehement demonstration of passion, no fierce blaze, no violent flash; but indications

enough to show the man of law all that was raging within. It had been for him like gazing at a fine building on fire, at that period of the conflagration, when dense smoke and heavy darkness brood over the fearful scene, while dull, suddenly smothered flashes break across the gloom, and tell how terrible will be the flame when it does burst freely forth.

He had never known Mrs. Hazleton before—he had never comprehended her fully. But now he knew her—now, though perhaps the depths were still unfathomable to his eyes, he felt that there was a strong commanding will within that beautiful form, which would bear no trifling. He had often treated her with easy lightness—with no want of apparent respect, indeed—but with the persuasions and arguments such as men of business often address to women as beings inferior to themselves, either in intellect or experience. Now, Mr. Shanks wondered how he had escaped so long and so well; and he resolved that

for the future his conduct should be very different.

Mrs. Hazleton, when he left her, sat down to rest—yes, to rest, for she was very weary. She had endured the fatiguing strife of strong passions in the heart—hopes — expectations — schemes — contrivances ; and, above all, a wrestling with herself to deal calmly and softly where she felt fiercely. It had exhausted her ; and for some minutes she sat listlessly, with her eyes half shut, like one utterly tired out. Ere a quarter of an hour had passed, wheels rolled up to the door, a carriage-step was let down, and there was a footfall in the hall.

“Dear Mrs. Warmington, delighted to see you!” exclaimed Mrs. Hazleton, rising with a smile as sweet and gentle as the dawn of a summer morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

CIRCUMSTANCE will always have its finger in the pie with the best laid schemes ; but it does not always happen that thereby the pie is spoiled. On the contrary, circumstance is sometimes a very powerful auxiliary ; and it happened so in the present instance with the arrangements of Mrs. Hazleton. Before that lady could bring to bear any part of her scheme for introducing Emily to the man whom she intended to drive her into taking as a husband,

the introduction had already taken place, as we have seen, by an accident.

It was likely, indeed, to go no further; for Emily thought over what had occurred before she gave way to her native kindness of heart: she remembered how tenacious all country gentlemen of that day were of their sporting rights, and especially of what she had often heard her father declare—that, according to every principle of equity and justice, he looked upon everybody who took his game off his property, as no better than a common robber.

“If the excuse be that it is more exposed to depredation than other property,” said Sir Philip, “it only shews that the plunderer of it is a coward as well as a villain, and should be punished the more severely.”

Such, and many such, speeches, she had heard from her father at various times; and it became a case of conscience, which puzzled the poor girl much, whether she ought or ought not to have promised not to

mention what had occurred in the park. She did not like concealment, and nothing would have induced her to tell a falsehood; but she knew that, if she mentioned the facts—especially while the young man whom she had seen crossing the park with a gun lay wounded at the cottage—great evil might have resulted; and, though she reproached herself for rashly giving her word, she would not break it when given.

As to seeing him again, however—as to visiting him at the cottage, even to inquire after his health, when he had refused all aid from her father's house,—that was an act she never dreamed of.

His last words, indeed, had puzzled her; and there was something in his face, too, which set her fancy wondering. It was not exactly what she liked; yet there was a resemblance, she thought, to some one she knew and was attached to. It could not be her father, she said to herself; yet her father's face recurred to

her mind more frequently than any other when she thought of that of the young man she had seen ; and from this fact a sort of prepossession in favour of the latter took possession of her, making her long to know who he really was.

For some days Emily did not go near the cottage ; but at length she ventured on the road which passed it—not without a hope, indeed, that she might meet one of the old people who tenanted it, and have an opportunity of inquiring after the patient's health—but certainly not, as some good-natured reader may suppose, with any expectation of seeing him herself. As she approached, however, she perceived him sitting on a bench at the cottage-door ; and, by a natural impulse, she turned at once into another path, which led back, by a way nearly as short, to the Hall. The young man instantly rose and followed her, addressing her by name in a voice still weak, in truth, but too loud for her not to hear or to affect not to hear.

She paused, rather provoked than otherwise, and slightly inclined her head, while the young man approached, with every appearance of respect, and thanked her for the assistance she had rendered him.

He had had his lesson in the mean time, and he played his part not amiss. All coarse swagger—all vulgar assumption—was gone from his manner ; and, referring himself to some words he had spoken when last they met, he said—

“ Pardon me, Miss Hastings, for what I uttered some days ago, which might seem strange and mysterious, and for pressing to see you again ; but at that time I was faint with loss of blood ; and, knowing not how this might end, I wished to tell you something I thought you ought to hear. But now I am recovering, and will find a more fitting opportunity ere long.”

“ It will be better to say anything you think fit to my father,” replied Emily. “ I am not accustomed to deal with matters of importance ; and anything of so

much moment as you seem to think this is, would of course be told by me to him."

"I think not," replied the other, with a mysterious smile; "but of that you will judge when you know all I have to say. Your father is the last person to whom I would mention it myself, because I believe, notwithstanding all his ability, he would not judge as soundly of it as he would of most other matters; but of course you will speak of it or not, as you think proper. At present," he added, "I am too weak to attempt the detail, even if I could venture to detain you here. I only wished to return you my best thanks, and assure you of my gratitude."

And bowing low, he left her to pursue her road homeward.

Emily went on musing. No woman's brain is without curiosity—nor any man's either; and she asked herself, at least a dozen times, what could be the meaning of this stranger's words. What could he have

to tell her ? and why was there so much mystery ? She did not like mystery, however ; and, though she felt interested in the young man—felt *pity*, in fact—yet it was by no means the interest that produces, nor the pity which is akin to, love. On the contrary, she liked him less than the first time she saw him. There was a certain degree of cunning in his mysterious smile ; a look of self-confidence, almost of triumph, in his face, which, in spite of his respectful demeanour did not please her.

Emily's father was absent from home at this time : but he returned two or three days after this last interview, and remarked that his daughter was unusually grave. To her, and to all that affected her in any way, his eyes were always open, though he often failed to comprehend that which he observed.

Lady Hastings, too, had noticed Emily's unusual gravity ; and as she had no clue to that which made her thoughtful, she

concluded that the solitude of the country had a depressing influence upon her spirits—as it frequently had upon her own—and she determined to speak to her husband upon the matter. To him she represented that the place was very dull; that they had but few visitors; that even Mr. Marlow had not called for a week; and that Emily really required some variety of scene and amusement.

She reasoned well, according to her notions; and though Sir Philip could not quite comprehend them, though he abhorred great cities, and loved the country, she had made some impression at least by reiteration, when suddenly a letter arrived from Mrs Hazleton, petitioning that Emily might be permitted to spend a few days with her.

“I am quite alone,” she said, “and not very well,” (she never was better in her life); “and I propose next week to make some excursions to all the beautiful and interesting spots in the neighbourhood.”

You know, dear Lady Hastings, there is small pleasure in such expeditions when they must be solitary ; but, with a mind like that of your dear Emily for my companion, every object will possess a double interest."

The reader has perceived that the letter was addressed to Lady Hastings ; but it was written for the eye of Sir Philip, and to him it was shewn. Lady Hastings observed, as she put the note into her husband's hand, that "it would be much better to go to London : the change from their own house to Mrs. Hazleton's was not enough to do Emily any good ; and that as to these expeditions to neighbouring places she had always found them the dullest things imaginable."

Sir Philip thought differently, however. He had been brought to the point of believing that Emily *did* want change, but not to the conviction that London would afford the best change for her. He enquired of Emily, however, which she

would like best—a week's sojourn with Mrs. Hazleton, or a short visit to the metropolis. Much to his satisfaction, Emily decided at once in favour of the former ; and Mrs. Hazleton's letter was answered, accepting her invitation.

The day before Emily went, Mr. Marlow spent nearly two hours with her and her father in that sort of musing, wondering conversation which is so delightful to imaginative minds. He paid Emily herself no marked or particular attention ; but he never suffered her to doubt that, even while talking with her father, he was fully conscious of her presence, and pleased with it. Sometimes his conversation was addressed to her directly ; and, when it was not, by a word or look he would invite her to join in, and listened to her words as if they were very sweet to his ear.

She loved to listen to him, however, better than to speak herself ; and he contrived to please and interest her in all

he said, gently moving all sorts of various feelings, sometimes making her smile gaily, sometimes muse thoughtfully, and sometimes rendering her almost sad.

If he had been the most practised love-maker in the world, he could not have done better with a mind like that of Emily Hastings.

He heard of her proposed visit to Mrs. Hazleton with pleasure, and expressed it.

"I am very glad to hear you are to be with her," he said, "for I do not think Mrs. Hazleton is well. She has lost her usual spirits, and has been very grave and thoughtful when I have seen her lately."

"Oh, if I can cheer and soothe her," cried Emily, eagerly, "how delightful my visit will be to me! Mrs. Hazleton says in her letter that she is unwell; and that decided me to go to her rather than to London."

"To London!" exclaimed Mr. Marlow; "I had no idea that you proposed such a journey. Oh, Sir Philip, do not take your

daughter to London. Friends of mine there are often in the habit of bringing in fresh and beautiful flowers from the country ; but I always see that they first become dull and dingy with the smoke and heavy air, and then wither away and perish ; and often, in gay parties, I have thought that I saw, in the young and beautiful around me, the same dulling influence, the same withering both of the body and the heart."

Sir Philip Hastings smiled pleasantly, and assured his young friend that he had no desire or intention of going to the capital except for one month in the winter ; and Emily looked up brightly, saying—

"For my part, I only wish that even then I could be left behind. When last I was there, I was so tired of the blue velvet lining of the gilt *vis-à-vis*, that I used to try and paint fancy pictures of the country upon it, as I drove through the streets with mamma."

At length, Emily set out in the heavy family coach, with her maid and Sir Philip

for her escort. Progression was slow in those days, compared with our own, when a man can get as much event into fifty years as Methuselah did into a thousand. The journey took three hours at the least; but it seemed short to Emily, for at the end of the first hour they were overtaken by Mr. Marlow on horseback, and he rode along with them to the gates of Mrs. Hazleton's house. He was an admirable horseman; for he had not only a good but a graceful seat; and his handsome figure and fine gentlemanly carriage never appeared to greater advantage than when he did his best to be a centaur. The slow progress of the lumbering vehicle might have been of some inconvenience; but his horse was trained to canter to a walk when he pleased; and, leaning to the window of the carriage, and sometimes resting his hand upon it, he contrived to keep up the conversation with those within, almost as easily as in a drawing-room.

Just as the carriage was approaching the gates, Marlow said—

“I think I shall not go in with you, Sir Philip, for I have a little business further on, and I have ridden more slowly than I thought.”

Before the sentence was well concluded, the gates of the park were opened by the porter, and Mrs. Hazleton herself appeared within, leaning on the arm of her maid. She had calculated well the period of Emily's arrival, and had gone out to the gate for the purpose of giving her an extremely hospitable welcome. Probably, had she not hated her as warmly and sincerely as she did, she would have stayed within : over attention is always doubtful.

But what were Mrs. Hazleton's feelings when she saw Mr. Marlow riding by the side of the carriage? I will not pretend to describe them ; but a strange, dark cloud passed over her beautiful face. It was banished in an instant ; but not before

Marlow had remarked both the expression itself, and the sudden glance of the lady's eyes from him to Emily. A doubt, a suspicion—a something he did not like to fathom—came over his mind ; and he resolved to watch. Neither Emily nor her father perceived that momentary look ; and as Mrs. Hazleton's face was once more as bright as ever, they felt pleased with her kind eagerness to meet them. Alighting from the carriage, they walked on with her to the house, while Marlow dismounted, and accompanied them, leading his horse.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Marlow," said Mrs. Hazleton, in a tone from which she could not—do what she would—banish all bitterness. "I suppose I owe the pleasure of your visit to that which you yourself feel in escorting a fair lady."

"I must not, I fear, pretend to such gallantry," replied Marlow. "I overtook the carriage accidentally, as I was riding to Mr. Cornelius Brown's; and, to say the

truth, I did not intend to come in, for I am somewhat late."

"Cold comfort for my vanity," returned the lady, "that you would not have paid me a visit unless you had met me at the gate."

She spoke in a tone of sadness rather than of anger ; but Marlow did not choose to perceive anything serious in her words ; and he replied, laughing—

"Nay, dear Mrs. Hazleton, you do not read the riddle aright. It shows, when properly interpreted, that your society is so charming, that I cannot resist its influence when once within the spell, even for the sake of the Englishman's god—Business."

"A man can always succeed in drawing some flattery for woman's ear out of the least flattering conduct," answered Mrs. Hazleton.

The conversation then took another turn ; and, after walking with the rest of the party up to the house, Marlow again

mounted and rode away. As soon as the horses had obtained some food and repose, Sir Philip also returned, and Emily was left with a woman who felt at her heart that she could have poniarded her not an hour before.

But Mrs. Hazleton was all gentle sweetness, and calm, thoughtful, dignified ease. She did not suffer her attention to be diverted, for one moment, from her fair guest : there was no reverie, no absence of mind ; and Emily—poor Emily—thought her more charming than ever. Nevertheless, while speaking upon many subjects, and brightly and intelligently upon all, an under-current of thought was going on unceasingly in Mrs. Hazleton's mind, different from that upon the surface. She was trying to read Marlow's conduct towards Emily—to judge whether he loved her or not. She asked herself if his having escorted her to that house was in reality purely accidental ; and she wished that she could have seen them together but for a

few moments longer, though every moment had been a dagger to her heart. Nay, she did more ; she strove, by many a dextrous turn of the conversation, to lure out her fair, unconscious guest's inmost thoughts ; to induce her, not to tell all, for of that she was hopeless, but to betray all. Emily, however, happily for herself, knew not there was anything to betray. Fortunately, most fortunately, she knew not what was in her own breast, or, perhaps, I should say, knew not what it meant. Her answers were all simple, natural, and true ; and plain candour, as often happens, disappointed art.

Mrs. Hazleton retired for the night, with the conviction that, whatever might be Marlow's feelings towards Emily, Emily was not in love with Marlow ; and that was something gained.

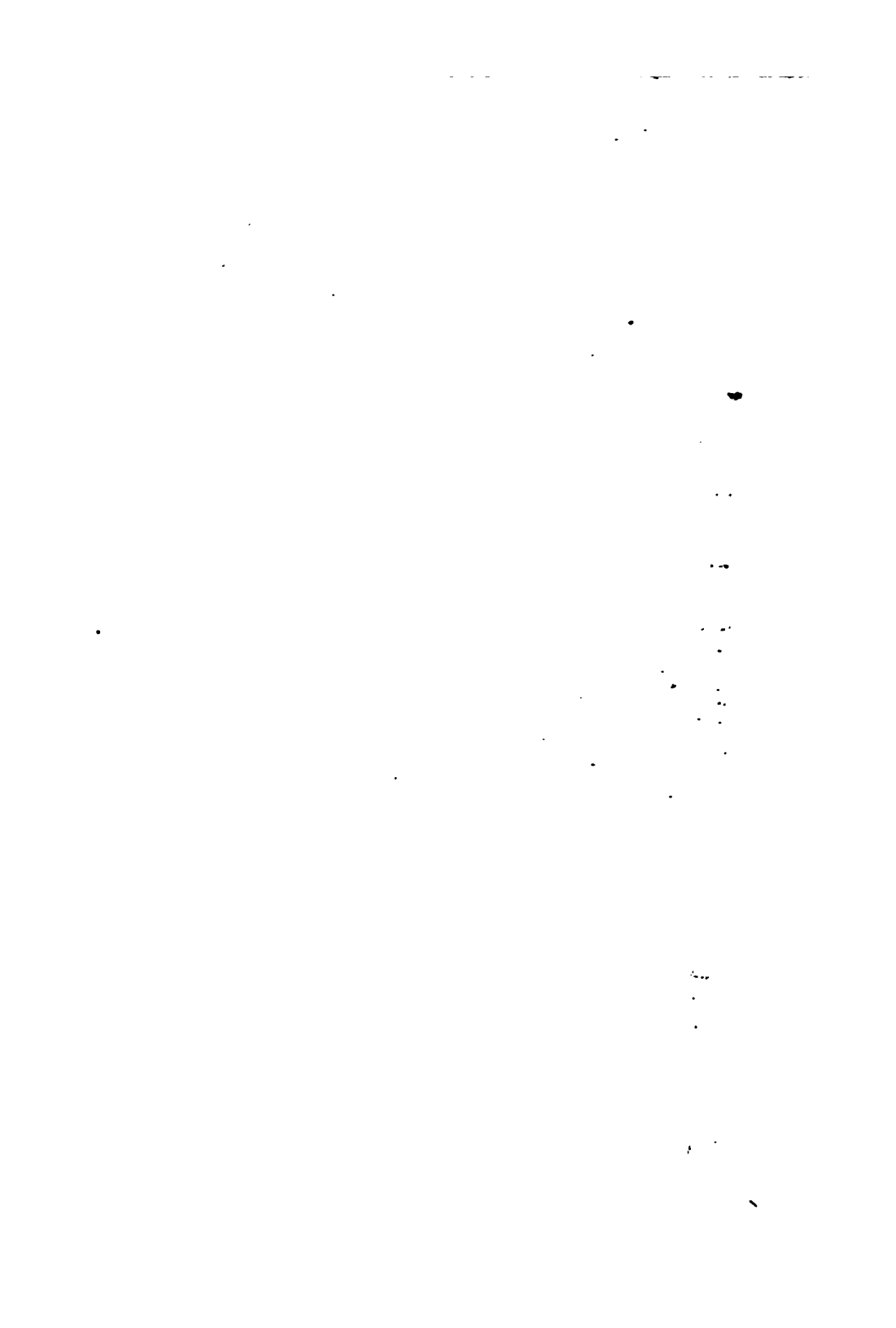
"No, no," she said, with a pride in her own discernment ; "a woman who knows something of the world can never be long deceived in regard to another woman's heart."

She could have added—"except by its simplicity."

"Now," she continued, mentally, "tomorrow for the first great step. If this young man can but demean himself wisely, and will follow the advice I have given him, he has a fair field to act in. He seems prompt and ready enough : he is assuredly handsome ; and, what between his good looks, kind persuasion by others, and her father's dangerous position, this girl, methinks, may be easily driven, or led into his arms ; and, that stumbling-block removed, he will punish her enough hereafter, or I am mistaken."

Punish her ! For what, Mrs. Hazleton ?

END OF VOL. I.



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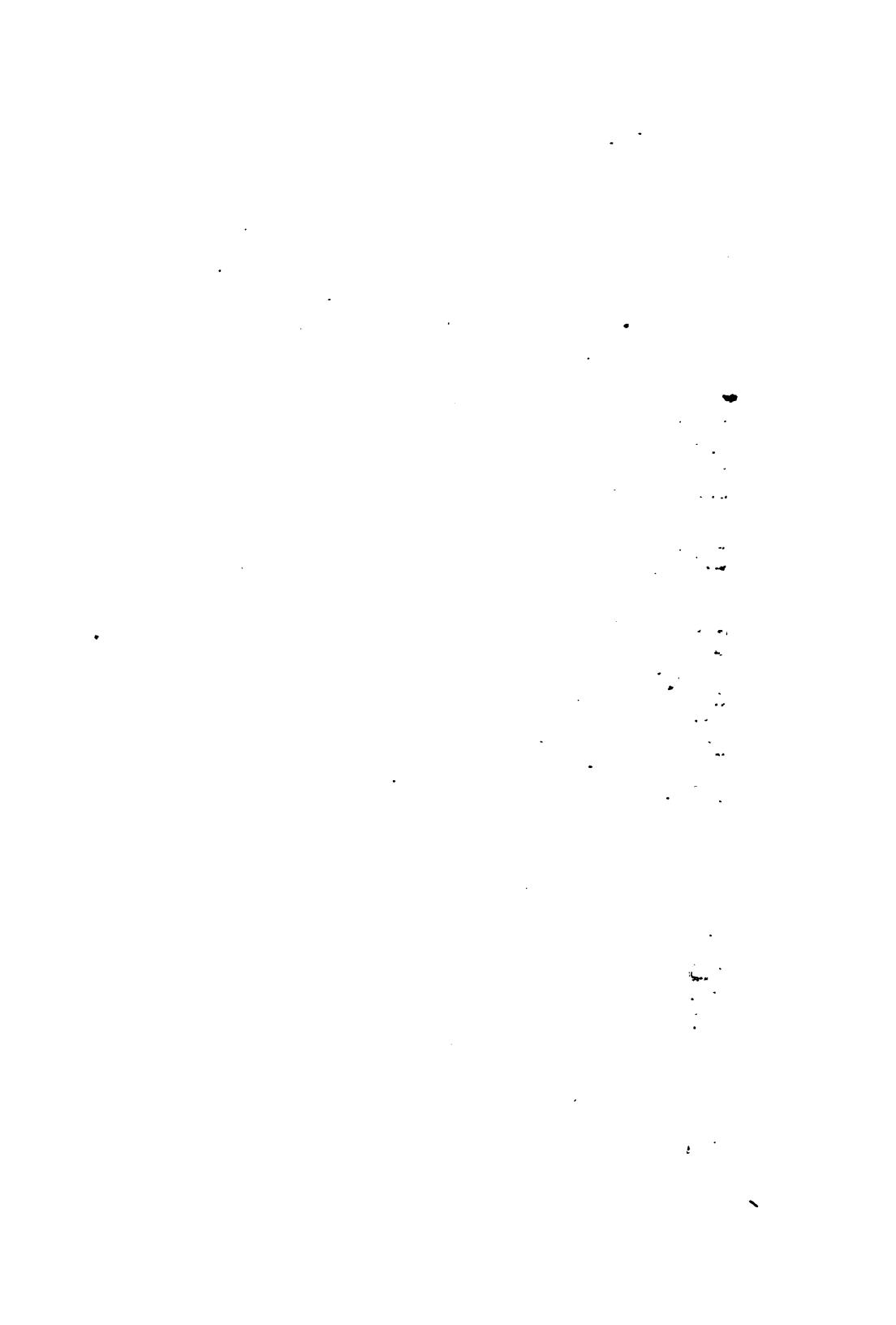
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